



**EXPLORING
DEEP CONCEPTS
&
MYSTERIES
OF THE BIBLE**

**EXPLANATIONS OF COMPLEX
BIBLICAL ISSUES**

by NEAL FOX

About the cover:

“Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds, the wonders of One complete in knowledge?”

“Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?” -- Job 37:16; 38:34

"These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." -- 1 Corinthians 2:10

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by Neal Fox

version 1.0 April 2, 2018

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“The Future Times: Biblical Prophecies About the Remainder of History & Beyond” 2017

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Introduction

This book explains some of the most important yet misunderstood concepts, principles and doctrines of the Bible. This will not be an easy study. If it were, such a study would be misguided and therefore useless. The Bible can be read and understood at many levels, from a cursory level to the deep concepts explaining the person of God Himself. Unfortunately, many Bible scholars have used the words "inscrutable" and "unknowable" about deep concepts of the Bible, believing many issues could not be understood this side of heaven. They were mistaken. Everything revealed through the Bible was meant to be understood, including the deepest subjects. Because "The Word of God is alive and powerful" and "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" it is therefore critical to the spiritual life of believers to understand what the Bible says, not just at a top level but also at the deep levels. It is the instruction manual for the Christian way of life. The deeper levels of the Bible are by definition hard to fathom, and it should be no surprise to the believer in Jesus Christ that God is a deep thinker. But God wants His believers to understand Him, and we can only know Him through His Word, and the deeper the level of spiritual knowledge a believer has, the closer that person comes to knowing and understanding God Himself. This book explores deep truths from God's Word, the information which transforms our thinking and renovates our minds, making our relationship with God deeper, stronger and more personal. In other words, it increases our faith, and faith is what we must live by.

The difficulty of understanding the deep concepts of the Bible is twofold, first the task of sorting out those deep subject areas God has woven into the fabric of the Bible, and secondly to overcome personal biases and misconceptions which are often firmly held. On the road to understanding the deep concepts of the Bible these two issues cause many to fall by the wayside. This book deals with and explains deep issues which are certainly difficult to understand. But since believers often have misconceptions about Biblical subjects, some things contained in this book will not line up with those previously held misconceptions. This issue is likely to be a serious barrier to understanding the contents of this book. Remember, we are trying to understand God Himself at a deep level, and if that were easy to do, we would be on the wrong track.

It is knowledge from the Word of God which reveals God, not emotionalism or rationalism or empirical evidence or mysticism or speculation or anything else. God has told us what He wants us to know, but not everything we want to know. That is because God requires us to ultimately live by faith, but faith is increased and strengthened by knowledge of Him and His plan which can only be learned from His Word. This is why understanding the deep concepts and doctrines of the Bible is important. It is not an intellectual enterprise, or learning for the sake of simply gaining knowledge, but rather it is learning about God for the purpose of understanding Him so we can worship and glorify Him to the maximum degree possible.

When dealing with deep concepts of the Bible a common question from believers goes something like “What Bible verse says that?” The fact is the more advanced doctrines of the Bible cannot be found or explained in a single verse of Scripture, or even several verses. The Bible makes the simplest issues clear in a verse or so. For example, salvation must be very clear and easy to understand for all casual readers, since God wants all to be saved, and He has made salvation simple for mankind to grasp. It is "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31) and other single verses with the simple message of salvation. But when it comes to complex principles and doctrines such as explaining the Trinity, eternity, the inner workings of the soul and human spirit, Satan’s plan, the Tribulation and many other issues we will cover, the information comes from understanding the entire Bible and pulling together many basic and advanced principles into a complete interwoven package. This is because God is the most complex subject imaginable, and we are mere mortals. But God has made understanding Him possible to a large degree, and this takes serious hard study and piecing together complex information from across the entire Bible. So when we begin to discuss the Trinity, and someone is tempted to ask “What Bible verse says that?” just realize the word Trinity is not even found in the Bible. But the Trinity is a true doctrine. It requires deep understanding of numerous principles from multiple places in the Bible, therefore getting to the deepest principles in the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle. One piece does not complete the entire picture. It is only by connecting piece to piece to piece that the full picture eventually comes into view. Therefore, no complex doctrine of the Word of God can be understood from a single verse or often several verses.

Although this is a book about the deeper things of the Bible, we will start with a very brief review of some of the basic fundamentals taught in the Bible since they are not understood by many believers

today. As with any complex study, the basic levels of the Bible must be understood correctly in order to understand the deeper levels. To many this basic information may even appear to be deep principles. Many go astray on their way to the deeper levels of understanding by failing to lay a firm foundation in the basic principles and doctrines of the Word of God, since the Bible builds knowledge upon knowledge just as a wall is built brick upon brick. A good foundation results in a good outcome. A shaky foundation leads to a heap of bricks. Learning advanced principles is based on knowing the basic principles.

If a believer wants to understand what the Bible says about God and spiritual issues at a deep level, that is what this book seeks to accomplish. The information contained in this book has been carefully studied over a lifetime, and faithfully reported as the best available information on the subjects presented herein. The spiritual growth of the person reading this information is the only purpose for the book.

What Every Believer Must Know – the Basics

If salvation is not understood first, then nothing else in the Bible can be understood. Accepting the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is the most important issue in life. It is the most basic answer to the question "Why are we here?" The Christian life begins with a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, which accepts God's free gift of salvation. It is as simple as "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31), "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16), "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Easy for us, very difficult for God and for Jesus Christ our Savior. God is a God of grace. He does the work, and we benefit. Salvation is given, not earned. And God's way is the only way.

This salvation entry point into God's gracious plan brings the individual into a personal relationship with God and ensures an eternity with Him instead of apart from Him. Without salvation a person cannot have fellowship with God during their time on earth or spend eternity with Him no matter how "good" they are, how little they sin, or how much they help other people. The Bible makes it clear that salvation is only through Jesus Christ, and it is a free gift from God which is accepted by an act of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Salvation is a one-time event, and is forever, unchangeable and irrevocable. Most people do not know much about what they are believing at the moment of salvation, but God does not make salvation difficult. He wants all to be saved. It is a choice, and salvation must be accepted, otherwise it is rejected. None of us are good enough to deserve to live eternally with God but God has made it possible, and it is only by faith in Jesus Christ who has removed the sin issue forever as a barrier to salvation. That faith in Christ means we accept and share in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and reject our own imperfect relative righteousness. The next chapter will discuss in detail what actually happens at the moment of salvation, so we will stay at the overview level here.

Once the free gift is accepted nothing else is required to retain it, to make that salvation more permanent, or make it better. That means nothing else such as church attendance, praying, avoiding certain sins, or anything else is necessary for the person to keep salvation once accepted by faith in

Jesus Christ. The other issues are about pleasing God once we are saved, and although important and result in increased blessings for the believer, they are not about retaining salvation. Salvation is permanent and even God cannot take it away, and He never would want to.

Once we have entered the realm of being eternally saved, also referred to as being a Christian or a believer in Christ, what comes next? How did this wonderful salvation come into being? What is expected of us now that we are in God's plan? If we are saved, why worry about anything else but living life?

Of course, God did not leave us in the dark about these questions. God is a God of light and revelation. He revealed to us everything we need to know, but not necessarily everything we would like to know, through the Bible. It should be no surprise then that we find the answers there. Although the Christian life begins with a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ, it does not end there. We remain on earth afterward to make continual positive decisions toward God including learning His Word and living the spiritual life by applying what we learn. Salvation is therefore only the beginning of the journey.

After salvation the person is in the family of God but does not yet understand what that means. The Bible refers to salvation as being "born again" so the family relationship analogy puts the new believer in a position of being a spiritual newborn who must grow up spiritually. As with any family, there are certain expectations of what is required to please the "parents", in this case God. Learning to please God becomes the main task for the rest of the person's life. 2 Peter 3:18 says: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." That learning and growing pleases God and makes our life more enjoyable as we grow to love Him by learning more about Him, and then apply what we have learned. And this in turn leads to greater blessings from God during our time on earth and also results in greater rewards during eternity. So although salvation cannot be lost by ignoring God's will for our life once we are saved, it is very important to understand that blessing can be lost by ignoring God's will for our life, both blessings in time and eternal blessings. Therefore a believer who lives a life of sin and ignores God's will ends up losing enormous amounts of blessings during their time on earth and also during eternity, even though they remain eternally saved.

So we see that growing up spiritually is the primary task required of the new believer. Growth inside any family requires food and learning from teaching. God has provided spiritual food in the form of principles written in the Bible which must be taught by a pastor who is well trained in understanding the Bible, which is the Word of God and the “mind of Christ.” So intake of the Word of God becomes the primary means of spiritual growth in the family in order to meet our spiritual obligations. 2 Peter 1:3-10 says: "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness... 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Learning about God's plan is not about drudgery, but just as in regular life a person starts as a newborn and must grow up, so also the spiritual life gets easier for those who grow up and fit into their intended position, act responsibly, become reliable, and generally become good citizens. In this case, good spiritual citizens. This means they please God by growing and fulfilling God's plan. And God also provides us with the power to do so through the Holy Spirit. God only expects back from us what He first gives to us, which includes both the knowledge and the power to live the spiritual life He expects of us. Therefore we do not give God anything except what He has first given to us.

The very first item the new believer needs to learn is that God requires continual requests for forgiveness whenever the believer sins, and all believers continue to sin for the remainder of their lives. God understands our weaknesses, and realizes we will continue to sin, so He does not view it as a deal breaker. Instead, He has made provisions for dealing with our personal sins after salvation. Therefore requesting forgiveness for sins is the means provided by God for maintaining the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit in the life, since the Holy Spirit cannot function when there is unconfessed sin. From 1 John 1:6 we learn “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth...8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” And 1 Thessalonians 7:16 adds “Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit.” The ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives is tied directly to the issue of dealing with sins we have committed, and all believers continue to commit sins. Therefore the sins we know about must be confessed to God the Father and all past sins are forgiven at that point, then we can move forward in our spiritual life empowered by the Holy Spirit. The key issue here is that God requires continual

positive choices toward His plan, first a positive decision to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, then positive decisions must be made regarding confession of sins and growing spiritually through learning God's Word so we can live the spiritual life and have the blessings God wants to give to us.

The request for forgiveness is directly from the believer to God the Father, not through an intermediary. This is not a process of begging, feeling sorry, or otherwise. Forgiveness is gained by simply admitting the sins to the Heavenly Father. "Father, I have done such and such." The reason this is necessary is because God requires us to make constant positive decisions in favor of Him, to continually go to Him and seek His grace. Admission of our sins to the Father is requesting His grace, and He always gives it. Asking God the Father for forgiveness of known sins also results in forgiveness of all prior sins, both known and unknown. Over time the believer can reduce the numbers and types of sins as spiritual growth occurs, but no one ever stops sinning completely while still alive, making these ongoing requests for forgiveness a lifelong requirement. And there are many more types of sin than most realize, with most of the sins we commit being mental sins such as arrogance, anger, envy, jealousy, and a long list of subtle sins which can creep into the soul. So the believer must understand that the list of sins is extensive, and any one of them will temporarily lose the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the only source of power for the believer to live the spiritual life, and that power increases as we grow spiritually. However, God cannot provide the level of spiritual support and blessings He desires to provide for a believer who has long periods of unconfessed sins in the life until the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is restored.

The believer must grow and leave the newborn status behind, then proceed through adolescence, and become a spiritual adult. We have noted 2 Peter 3:18 which says "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!" The believer glorifies Jesus Christ as he grows in knowledge of God's Word. This growth must be accomplished by learning what God has told us through the Bible, and requires teaching from a Pastor who has studied the Bible in great detail. That is not as easy as it may seem, and requires searching for a Pastor who actually teaches from the Bible instead of giving baby food to a believer ready for adult foods. Looking back at the forgiveness of sins issue, a believer must begin each Bible learning session making sure to be "in fellowship" with God by requesting forgiveness of sins. God the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to learn Bible doctrines from a Pastor who teaches them, but unforgiven sin prevents

empowerment by the Holy Spirit. These continual requests for forgiveness of sins cannot be overemphasized in the spiritual life, since without it spiritual growth will be severely stunted. Learning spiritual information is not the same as learning any other type of information, since apart from God's power we "cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit." (1 Corinthians 2:14)

During the initial stages of spiritual growth the believer does not have enough understanding of the Bible to have a strong faith, so must instead rely on promises from the Bible to provide strength in times of testing and difficulty. The Bible contains many such promises, which are short phrases emphasizing the faithfulness and love of God toward the believer. An example of such a verse of promise is Isaiah 40:31 "but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." The Bible is full of short and succinct verses which the believer can grab during times of trouble, hardship, grief and distress. These are to some extent spiritual crutches for the growing believer until they have built up spiritual confidence once they understand in depth the Bible and as a result know God as an intimate friend, not as a far-off benefactor. But we must all start somewhere in the spiritual life, and using the promises of the Bible helps boost us upward and can help get us through the tough times during the early stages of growth. But to truly live the spiritual life God has in store for us, we must grow beyond that level and achieve spiritual maturity where we instinctively trust God because we know He has already provided before we even ask, as Matthew 6:8 says "your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

It is in spiritual adulthood where the believer begins to fully function as a spiritually mature and highly productive member of the family in terms of how "pleased" God is, when we are mature enough to bring glory to our Savior Jesus Christ and begin accumulating rewards for eternity. Ephesians 4:15-16 says: "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Note how often the Bible emphasizes growth in knowledge as the means of achieving the mature spiritual life. Believers are all part of the "body of Christ" which describes the totality of believers as functioning together to support the glorification of Jesus Christ. Each believer has a spiritual gift given to them at the moment

of salvation. As the believer grows spiritually, that spiritual gift will begin to function. Often we do not even know what that gift is. As we see, the most important aspect of life as a believer is to learn and grow, which increases our love for God and enables greater spiritual strength to face the difficulties the world will present to us. Growth in the Word strengthens our faith, and the Bible tells us “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

God loves all believers, but He is not equally pleased with each one. Spiritually mature believers are called “friends of God”. Jesus told His disciples “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:14-15) Note once again the emphasis on spiritual learning and knowing “God’s business” as revealed in the Bible, then after that being called a “friend” of God. The more mature the believer becomes in understanding and implementing the Word of God in the life, the more that believer will be blessed by God, both in life and in eternity since this type of spiritual life pleases God our Father and glorifies Jesus Christ our Savior by using the power of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual growth also makes our prayers and every other aspect of our spiritual life more effective. The maturing process is one which takes time, and requires continual learning and growing over the entire life of the believer. God wants to bless the believer. However, God waits until we are prepared for blessings, otherwise we would focus on the blessing instead of on God Himself. We focus on what we want, but God focuses on what we need and also on what we can handle. And there will be testing along the way, which makes the spiritual life stronger and more focused on what is important. The more mature the believer becomes through growth in the Word, the more God can bless each believer; but blessing is unique to each one and does not mean all will have material wealth. Essentially, most believers get in the way of the blessing God wants to deliver, mainly due to lack of spiritual growth. And lack of spiritual growth is often due to focusing on living life as a secular project, just like the spiritually empty unbeliever lives.

Therefore each believer must understand that the spiritual life has stages. We enter the spiritual life by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, then we are inside of God's plan forever. At that point we are required to express continual positive decisions toward God. These include maintaining the power of the Holy

Spirit by regular requests for forgiveness of sins, plus spiritual learning and growth over a lifetime through the various phases to spiritual maturity. When these steps are followed the believer will “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18), and will have an increasingly effective spiritual life resulting in greater blessing during the time remaining on earth followed by increased rewards in eternity. Simply being a believer in Jesus Christ allows God to supply the basic needs of all believers, but the real blessings and eternal rewards are reserved for those who grow to spiritual maturity and remain there over the long term.

We have begun with the basics of what every believer must know since so many do not understand those basic truths. Advanced knowledge depends on first understanding the basic principles. Now we will begin to unravel some of the deepest concepts and doctrines from the Word of God. That is our journey.

Salvation -- What Happens When a Person Believes in Christ?

We have discussed that salvation is a free gift from God through a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. But what actually happens at that single point in time, a moment of faith when the person's eternal destiny is forever changed? How does such a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ result in eternal salvation? And what actual changes occur in the new believer?

It is important to first understand that mankind is hopeless to save itself, therefore God must save each one of us individually, but He requires us to accept or reject what He provides. God demands perfect righteousness, not some form of relative righteousness, and no matter how good someone might appear to be it is never good enough to meet God's perfect standards. Therefore salvation is accepting what Christ has done for us. First, Jesus Christ removed the sin issue as a barrier to salvation since He paid in full the penalty due for all sins of mankind. Secondly, Jesus Christ made it possible to claim His own righteousness as the basis of a relationship with God, which is rejecting our own inadequate righteousness and instead claiming the perfect righteousness of Christ. Romans 3:10 says "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." And 2 Corinthians 5:21 says "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Therefore, accepting the salvation work of Jesus Christ is accepting two issues, namely that He paid the penalty for our sins, and also that He provides us with His own righteousness in place of our own works.

God only provides salvation through faith because He cannot allow imperfect mankind into a relationship with Him based on the merit of the person. The nicest, least sinful, and most charitable person who ever lived could never attain perfection on their own apart from Christ. Therefore, God developed a plan, and sent Jesus Christ the God-Man to save us. John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." Salvation is a grace gift bought and paid for by Jesus Christ. This payment occurred on the cross when He was judged for every sin ever committed, past or future. And this removal of the sin issue in turn allowed God to offer mankind salvation by accepting the righteousness of Jesus Christ instead of our own

relative and inadequate righteousness. To say anything must be added insults the salvation work of Jesus Christ, declaring it to be inadequate; therefore it cannot be added to, earned, or purchased by us, only received. God's requirement for accepting the free gift is one simple act of faith, which is essentially reaching out and taking hold of the gift God is handing to each unbeliever. Faith is the only positive act which everyone can do equally. If God made salvation contingent on mental capacity to think or ability to perform works, some would have an unfair advantage over others. Faith makes everyone equal when it comes to receiving salvation. That is the fairness of God, and it is also the only procedure which aligns with His perfect righteousness.

At the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, God sets into motion a series of changes in the person and in their eternal status. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes all the changes, enabling salvation to be effective in the person. The individual cannot feel these changes, but they are very real. Some may have an emotional response knowing they are now eternally saved, but that is an individual response, not a result of the internal changes. And those changes lock in the eternal status as being permanently saved regardless of what happens after that moment of salvation. While all these changes are simultaneous, it helps us to understand them if they are viewed separately and in sequence.

Among the changes which occur at salvation is restoration of the human spirit. Each person is born with a soul but no human spirit, which Adam and Eve had at creation but lost when they sinned in the Garden of Eden. This loss of the human spirit is the definition of spiritual death, and this status of spiritual death was subsequently handed down to all their descendants, who are born without a human spirit. The exception is Jesus Christ who was born spiritually alive, and this issue will be discussed in a later chapter. Salvation makes the new believer spiritually alive, meaning the human spirit is regained. This restoration of the human spirit makes the person a spiritual being, now capable of knowing and interacting with God. It is that human spirit which allows us to understand spiritual information, which is why unbelievers cannot understand such things since they lack a human spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: "The person without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness..." God the Holy Spirit is the one who restores the human spirit at the moment of salvation, since He is the member of the Trinity involved in making all salvation changes a reality at that moment of faith in Christ.

Another primary change which occurs at the moment of salvation is that we now share the righteousness of Jesus Christ, giving us a perfect righteousness in God's eyes even though it is not our own. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Of course, all believers continue to sin personally, but God still views each believer as being covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ the Savior for eternity. So we see a major change occurs at the moment of salvation whereby God declares us to be righteous in association with Jesus Christ. From that point on, no matter how much we sin or fail God looks at us and sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ in us. Therefore God no longer views us as lost sinners but as sharing the righteousness of Christ because we have accepted by faith what He did for us on the cross. When God looks at an unbeliever He sees unrighteousness and spiritual death. It is amazing to understand that God can look at us as believers who remain sinful and imperfect and see perfect righteousness in us. But it is not our own perfect righteousness God sees, but rather the perfection of Jesus Christ which is shared with all believers. God stamps us "made perfect in Christ" as a result of salvation, and then deals with our continued sins as having been taken out of the way by Christ, allowing us to request forgiveness to put them behind us so we can move on with our spiritual life inside the family of God. God deals with believers on the basis of His love because we are viewed as righteous, but God deals with unbelievers on the basis of His righteousness because they remain unrighteous. In eternity that perfection of Christ in believers will become a reality in our new resurrection bodies and we will be truly sinless and perfect righteousness forever.

Also at the moment of salvation the new believer becomes a "fellow heir" with Jesus Christ and shares in many wonderful things which Christ earned as a result of His salvation work on the cross. Romans 8:15 says: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..." The righteousness of Jesus Christ is not the only thing He shares with us as His "fellow heir." He also shares his priesthood, giving us the right to act on our own behalf and interface directly with God the Father. He shares His status of rulership, and we will rule with Him as members of His royal court during the Millennium. He essentially shares with His Church Age believers all He possesses, which is why the Church is called the "Bride of Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:2)

Another change at the moment of salvation is the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and also by extension the entire Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell every believer, as 1 John 4:13 says:

"This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." At the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit not only indwells us as believers but also becomes the source of empowerment for our spiritual life. And the Holy Spirit also gives each new believer at least one spiritual gift, one which will become evident over time as the believer grows spiritually.

Each new believer is also provided with a guardian angel. That angel is always present, and watches over the person in many ways. That protection has limits, and we must not test those limits or fail to act rationally or wisely, but this protection is something which makes our lives less subject to the whims of chance and accidents of everyday life. Unbelievers live by chance and at the whims of fate, but believers live by faith and have protection inside God's plan, therefore fate does not apply to believers. And our personal guardian angel plays an important role in that regard.

Additionally, when we believe in Jesus Christ for salvation our name becomes permanent in the Book of Life, a registry of those with eternal salvation. The names of those who have accepted God's salvation will be in the Book of Life at the end of human history, and the names of those who did not accept God's salvation will not be found. Once again this shows that our salvation is permanent and therefore cannot be lost.

We also become a child of God with all the rights and blessings of being part of His family, including the opportunity to communicate with God and have prayers heard and answered. Romans 8:14 says: "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship." God treats believers as part of His family. Unbelievers are not, so they do not share anything God has, nor can they pray or have any form of fellowship or interaction with God.

As a person is maturing humanly they come to a point of accountability to God for their decision regarding salvation. Children and certain people with low mental function are not accountable for a salvation decision, so are automatically saved if they die before they become accountable, or

sometimes are unable to become accountable. However, once that accountability is reached the person has a critical decision to make, to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior or to reject salvation. That one primary decision is why all people are put on earth. The opportunity is not shut down at that point if rejected, but if the person dies afterward they are responsible for the decisions made to that point. But the overall issue is that humans are required to make decisions, first to believe in God or reject Him, and then to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior or reject Him. As the main reason we are put on the earth it defines and answers the humanly unanswerable question "Why are we here?" It is an answer only understood by faith as taught from the Word of God.

Therefore, at the moment of salvation we become something completely different, set apart, and new. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" The believer is made whole with the revival of the human spirit, and becomes an entirely different creature than the unbeliever. God now looks at the believer and sees His own righteousness shared with him by Jesus Christ, and never again looks at the believer as being lost in sin no matter how much the believer might fail afterward. God deals with believers on the basis of His love, but deals with unbelievers on the basis of His righteousness. We become part of the family of God, and God takes responsibility for caring for us as His child. Jesus Christ shares what He has earned with us, making us His fellow heirs. And spiritual growth after salvation brings those shared items to a more complete fulfillment. Believers have the power of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual gift, a guardian angel, and other spiritual provisions to make our spiritual life more impactful. Our life becomes part of a plan, has meaning and purpose, and is no longer based on chance and fate. From the moment of salvation we are forever changed and a member of God's eternal family, and those changes cannot be undone or lost. We are freed from the fear of death if we choose to understand what we have received, which is a spiritual inheritance of incalculable eternal value.

What Happened on the Cross?

Christians understand that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for their sins on the cross to provide salvation and eternal life. But surprisingly few understand what actually happened during the six hours while Jesus was on the cross, or how the work of Christ on the cross could have provided salvation. Most assume it was the physical death of Christ which provided salvation, but that is not correct. It was what He did during the several hours while He was alive on the cross, prior to His physical death, which made our salvation possible. This is one of the most misunderstood issues of the Bible, and also one of the most important, so we will start with an overview summary, then examine the details afterward.

The perfect righteousness of God the Father required punishment for sins in order to allow humans to be offered salvation. Therefore the sin issue needed to be taken out of the way since it was an impenetrable barrier between God and man, so full payment for sin was required to allow God to have an eternal relationship with any person. The physical death of Jesus after six hours on the cross could not meet such demands of the Father since it alone could not provide the actual punishment required as payment for every sin of every person who will ever live. Rather, salvation is the result of what is called the “substitutionary atonement sacrifice” of Jesus Christ on the cross, meaning the perfect God-Man substituted Himself as a sacrifice in place of sinful mankind and took on Himself the literal physical and soulful punishment for all sins in order to pay the penalty of sin required by God. The key here is punishment, since God the Father demanded full payment in the form of punishment for all sin, and salvation could not be offered apart from the punishment of an acceptable sacrifice to remove the sin issue. God could not have a relationship with man without full payment for sin, and sinful man could never make such a payment since as sinners none were qualified.

The key issue regarding what happened on the cross is how Jesus Christ was substituted as a suitable sacrifice acceptable to God and punished for sinful mankind in order to remove the sin problem between God and man. Only this could enable salvation for all who would accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for them. That punishment for sin took three hours on the cross, not just a moment of physical death. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 1 Peter 2:24 says "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Jesus Christ was treated by God the Father as though He had personally committed every sin of every person of all time. Jesus was judged guilty of all of those sins by the Father, and then physically and soulishly tortured for each and every one of them over a three hour period while on the cross. That three hours of torture, beyond the pain inflicted by the crucifixion itself, was the punishment which made our salvation possible. Thousands of people died on Roman crosses, and all of them suffered horribly; but only Jesus Christ was directly punished for sin by God the Father while on a cross. The physical death of Christ by itself could not have made the required payment to satisfy the demand for punishment of all sins by the Father. Jesus looked forward to His death so He could be with His Father, so it was not punishment at all. Therefore it was the last three hours on the cross when Jesus Christ was directly punished by the Father which was the sacrifice resulting in full payment for every sin of all mankind, past and future. Isaiah 53:5 says: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." Notice the emphasis on physical punishment and even torture resulting in extreme physical and soul pain. He was our innocent substitute, deemed worthy by God the Father to make atonement, and He bore the full punishment in the form of physical and soulish torture on behalf of us who were actually guilty of those sins.

This substitutionary sacrifice for sin does not diminish the physical death of Christ since it was important for a couple reasons, even though it did not play a direct role in providing salvation. It was important to demonstrate Jesus Christ to be true humanity to the world, so the bleeding from His hands and feet, and from the scourging and crown of thorns, and also from the piercing of His side by the spear, plus His actual physical death all served to demonstrate His true humanity. God does not bleed or die. Angels do not bleed or die. Only a true human can do such things. Jesus Christ was shown to be truly human because of the cross, and His earthly ministry showed He was truly God at the same time. For this reason the physical death of Jesus Christ was a very significant issue, even though not a direct part of His salvation work.

As background for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Jewish leadership of Israel rejected their Messiah and demanded His execution, mainly on the false charge of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah prophesied about in the Scriptures. But of course, He was who He claimed to be. But God had a plan in all of this. At that time in the Roman-controlled Province of Judea crucifixion was a common form

of Roman execution. By contrast, Jewish execution was done by stoning. The reason God's plan used the Roman form of execution was to allow sufficient time for Jesus to bear the punishment required by the Father to provide full payment for the sins of all mankind. That sacrificial work would take some time, three hours to be exact. Stoning would not provide sufficient time since it only took minutes, but crucifixion generally lasted all day. Thousands of people died on Roman crosses, but there was something very unique about this one cross where Jesus Christ hung for a total of six hours before He died physically. And He did not bleed to death since that was not how crucifixion killed people. Crucifixion was a method of slow torture prior to death, and the cause of death was not due to bleeding, but rather asphyxiation (suffocation):

“Death by crucifixion was the result of the manner in which the condemned man hung from the cross and not the traumatic injury caused by nailing. Hanging from the cross resulted in a painful process of asphyxiation, in which the two sets of muscles used for breathing, the intercostal [chest] muscles and the diaphragm, became progressively weakened. In time, the condemned man expired, due to the inability to continue breathing properly.”

"New Analysis of the Crucified Man" by Hershel Shanks, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, November/December 1985.

It was a long, slow method of execution taking all day, and sometimes more than a day. But the cross did not cause the physical death of Jesus Christ at all. As we will see He simply dismissed His soul and spirit after salvation was accomplished, while He was still capable of living quite a while longer. The two thieves crucified alongside Jesus were alive long after Jesus had given up His soul and spirit on His own initiative. The thieves were actually killed by the Roman soldiers since Passover was about to begin, and the Jews did not want Jesus or them hanging there during Passover, so the thieves did not even die from the crucifixion itself, and certainly not from bleeding to death.

The time line for the cross started with an initial nailing of Jesus to the wooden cross and elevating Him into position at 9 AM. For the first three hours Jesus had interactions with those on the ground, including giving instructions for caring for His mother, talking with the thieves being crucified on both sides of Him, one of whom believed in Jesus as the Messiah, and there was also much ridicule and taunting from those on the ground who sent Him to the cross:

“In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe. Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.” (Mark 15:31-32).

“Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” (John 19:25-27)

The first three hours did not provide salvation for mankind. This was a time when Jesus continued to fulfill prophecies from the Old Testament, witnessed to the two thieves, and took care of other matters. It was only the last three hours on the cross from noon until 3 PM which provided the substitutionary atonement sacrifice for removal of the sin barrier between God and man, but did not include His actual physical death which occurred after the three hours of salvation work were completed. 1 John 2:2 says "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." Jesus was sinless humanity and therefore qualified to be the substitute for sinful mankind, just as the Old Testament Levitical offerings showed with the sacrifice of an innocent, spotless lamb. God the Father declared Jesus guilty of every sin ever committed by mankind (past and future) then literally tortured Jesus in the full amount required as punishment for each and every sin of all time. This torture was body, soul and spirit pain, the most intense ever encountered in history, and it lasted for three hours. Therefore it was the three hours of continuous physical, soul, and spirit torture which satisfied the demands of the Father for payment for the sins of all mankind, which in turn allowed God to offer mankind salvation by a simple act of faith in Christ, the only one who could remove the sin barrier.

During the last three hours the area around the cross was covered in supernatural darkness to prevent anyone from seeing Jesus or interfering with what would happen next. Satan was also excluded by the darkness, and he desperately wanted to interfere. Darkness is used as chains for angels as in the demon jail called the Abyss, since their bodies are made of something resembling light. So this darkness was a barrier to Satan as well as a screen from humans. “At noon, darkness came over the whole land until

three in the afternoon” (Mark 15:33). During these three hours Jesus screamed continually. “And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").” (Mark 15:34)

It was during these final three hours with the cross shrouded in darkness when God the Father had to forsake His Son Jesus Christ and punish Him as the substitute sacrifice for all sins of all time. The cross was an altar and Jesus Christ was the innocent sacrificial lamb, nailed to that altar for the purpose of taking the punishment for the sins of the world which He did not deserve. During the judgment period of the cross the Father had to treat Jesus Christ as though He was personally responsible for each and every sin ever committed in human history and punish Him for those sins. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” While on the cross Jesus Christ remained personally sinless and perfect, and never lost His human spirit or His deity. He was a substitute sacrifice for sins, and therefore He was not personally guilty of any of them. But the Father could have no relationship with the humanity of Jesus while He was being punished as the substitute sacrifice for sin, hence the "forsaking" of Christ during those three hours. At the end of the three hours Jesus yelled out quoting Psalm 22:1 “why have you forsaken me” as a sign that He had been tortured for our sins by God the Father for three continuous hours. And the remainder of that same Bible passage from Psalm 22 goes on to provide the answer to the rhetorical question by continuing with “you are enthroned as the Holy One” meaning the Father needed to forsake Christ while being judged for sin because God the Father had to remain separated from sin itself while judging it in Christ. Jesus knew why He was being forsaken and punished since He willingly accepted the awful task of paying for sins, knowing it was the only way to bring God and sinful man into an eternal relationship. This forsaking and judging of Jesus Christ during the final three hours of the cross was the "sacrificial death" which provided salvation for all mankind. And it is this sacrificial death which the Bible discusses in numerous passages, whereby Jesus was made a substitute sacrifice and "died" for the sins of all mankind. He was forsaken and judged by the Father, while dying a sacrificial death but not a physical death during those three hours of judgment. But after the three hours of punishment, the Father ended the forsaking, and the relationship was re-established, as shown when Jesus again addressed Him as "Father". During the forsaking period Jesus addressed Him as "my God". Although this time of forsaking and punishment has sometimes been referred to as a "spiritual death", that is defined as losing the human spirit, and Jesus

never lost His human spirit, on the cross or otherwise. A better phrase would be "sacrificial death" which shows the extreme degree of punishment endured by Jesus Christ while bearing the punishment for sin, during which time He continued to remain entirely perfect.

After the three hours of continuous torture, Jesus showed that His sacrificial work was completed, and that salvation by faith was now possible since all necessary salvation work had been fully accomplished: "Later, knowing that everything had now been finished.... Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." (John 19:28-30) Note the phrase "everything had now been finished", which means salvation was a completed task while Jesus was still alive. This shows that Jesus did not die physically to provide salvation since everything was finished prior to His physical death, rather than because of it.

His continuing to speak and even shout after the salvation work was accomplished shows He was not close to asphyxiation, nor was He about to die from bleeding. Someone about to die from asphyxiation or bleeding would not be able to speak and shout, and then immediately expire. Remember what Mark 15 said "And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" Note the "loud voice" which means Jesus was not close to dying from asphyxiation, yet He would be dead within a couple minutes. He also said after that "I thirst" and drank from a reed offered to Him. Then He said "It is finished" meaning salvation was accomplished, and finally "Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.". All of this shows His death was not a result of the cross itself, since He could still shout and talk in full sentences, but rather once His sacrificial work was done (the three hours of torture), there was nothing left for Him to accomplish on earth so He simply left His body behind and departed it of His own free will. Jesus said "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10: 17-18). His physical death was not something Jesus wanted to avoid or found punishing. It was merely the proper time since His work on earth was fully accomplished.

Jesus was nailed to the cross in his hands and feet, but this did not cause Him to bleed to death. References to the "blood of Christ" in the Bible are not about His literal blood but rather they tie in the

animal blood sacrifices of the Old Testament, which represented by analogy the sacrificial work of the future Messiah on the cross. The literal blood of the animals was therefore an analogy to the sacrificial death of Jesus as He was tortured for three hours on the cross. The animal blood sacrifices were analogies which looked forward to the substitutionary atonement sacrifice of the Messiah who would be judged for the sins of all mankind. These sacrifices were used to teach salvation principles to the Jews before the Bible was completed. The cross was an alter upon which Jesus Christ was sacrificed for all mankind, and He was nailed to it just as the animal sacrifices were tied down to the sacrificial alters during Old Testament times, followed by sacrificing them by shedding their blood. And just as the animals being sacrificed were not guilty of any wrongdoing, they represented the perfect and sinless Messiah, the God-Man Jesus Christ who would become our substitute sacrifice for sin. Jesus Christ took our punishment on Himself and was tortured, and the blood of Christ refers to the three hours of judgment as payment for the sins of mankind when Christ was physically tortured for each and every sin in the amount required by the Father as full payment. As 1 Peter 2:24 says "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Hebrews 10:8-10 says: "First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. ⁹ Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Ephesians 2:15 "by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations." Isaiah 53:4 says "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed... ¹² For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Note the emphasis in these verses on the flesh, body, pain and suffering of Jesus Christ which shows the torture was physical and extended from there to create agony in His soul and human spirit, a total suffering experience far beyond what any human ever experienced before or since. And it was not merely the pain of crucifixion, since that was nothing compared to the torture from the Father for the sins of mankind. This was the payment for sin which only Jesus Christ the perfect sacrifice could accomplish. Simply bleeding was not torture and could not satisfy the requirement for punishment from God the Father, and it was also not the cause of His death, since crucifixion did not cause people to die from blood loss. Jesus had a strong voice and was fully conscious and alert right up

to the point of death, showing His death was not from loss of blood or asphyxiation since weakness from either of those would not have allowed Him to be strong and alert until the end. And after Jesus was dead, when pierced by the Roman soldiers' spear there was still a lot of blood in His upper body showing He did not bleed to death. John 19:24 says: "Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." Bleeding to death would have drained such a quantity of blood and fluids. As mentioned earlier, crucifixion did not kill people by bleeding, but by asphyxiation. Jesus did not die from either cause, but rather He departed His body of His own will after His salvation work was completed.

To further explain the blood of Christ as referring to the salvation work of Jesus Christ on the cross, the Bible outlines three specific parts of the salvation work of Christ, which are propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation, and these three combined are referred to as the substitutionary atonement sacrifice. The animal sacrifices represented these three components of salvation. Propitiation means satisfaction, and God the Father's perfect righteousness needed to be satisfied by punishing all sins before He could offer salvation to man. Redemption means Christ paid off all the debts due for sin, and also resolved the original sin of Adam which was handed down to all mankind. As 1 Corinthians 15:22 says "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Therefore the sacrifice of Jesus Christ bought or "redeemed" mankind out of its debt to sin. And finally reconciliation means God and man were brought back together or "reconciled" since Jesus Christ resolved the sin issue to the satisfaction of the Father, allowing a personal relationship to exist once again between God and man through Jesus Christ. These three complex issues of satisfying God while paying for the sins of all mankind, namely propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation, are tied together into the substitutionary atonement sacrifice, and are collectively referred to in the Bible as the "blood of Christ", since each of these three issues harken back to the animal sacrifices and also could not be individually explained every time the subject is mentioned. The "blood of Christ" is therefore a phrase used to cover the entirety of the salvation work of Jesus Christ on the cross, which was the three hours of torture which provided our salvation.

By His work on the cross Jesus Christ provided reconciliation of mankind to God, and allowed God to offer salvation to every person who would ever live in all human history. The act of faith by each person is a recognition that we are not able to overcome our own sins, but rather we accept the sacrifice

of Jesus Christ on behalf of us. But each person must accept the free gift of salvation provided by Jesus Christ, or else stand on their own merits at the Last Judgment. No one who refuses to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior will be acceptable to God since they will have rejected the only way of salvation offered by God the Father through Jesus Christ. Jesus said “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Those who reject Jesus Christ’s substitutionary payment will stand before Him at the Last Judgment asking to be accepted based on their own works, but that will never be enough to satisfy God’s requirements for a relationship with Him. The key is that when a person accepts the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf they are saved by God imputing perfect righteousness to them, something otherwise unattainable by any person. This does not mean we stop sinning, but rather it means God sees us as acceptable to Him from then on since Jesus Christ shares His own righteousness with each believer, no matter what happens after that. Even though believers continue to sin all their lives, they will spend eternity with God since they have accepted the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Therefore sin is no longer the issue as the result of Jesus Christ’s full payment for all sins on the cross. His sacrifice satisfied the righteousness of God and provided for reconciliation between God and mankind, allowing salvation to be offered as a free gift to all who will accept the work of the Savior instead of their own inadequate works and unacceptable human self-righteousness. The issue of sin as a barrier between God and man was removed by the Savior. This is why the Temple curtain was ripped from top to bottom at the exact time Christ finished His work of salvation on the cross, since the curtain represented a barrier between God inside the Holy of Holies (Heaven) and man outside. The barrier of sin was removed providing reconciliation between God and man, so the 18 inch thick curtain was ripped wide open as a symbol that the sin barrier was indeed gone. Hebrews 9:26 says “But he [Jesus Christ] has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many.” God the Father has been satisfied by the full payment for sin accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross, but each person during their lifetime must accept the free gift, which act of acceptance is required for a person to actually receive salvation. Rejection of the free gift means eternal condemnation since the only way of salvation is by accepting the work of Jesus Christ who resolved the sin issue. Rejection of the free gift offered only through Jesus Christ means

the person will attempt to prove himself worthy apart from Christ, which is impossible and always results in eternal condemnation. God provided the only way for salvation, and the cost to Him was beyond measure and humanly unfathomable. To reject the free gift of salvation results in an equally unfathomable eternal punishment.

Jesus Christ as the perfect God-Man did what no one else could when He took on Himself the guilt for all sins of all time and paid for every one of those sins during three hours of the most intense torture while on the cross. We could never have paid for our own sins, and must not try, especially since the issue has been resolved by Jesus Christ for us. Salvation is only by accepting what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross since it is the only thing which satisfies God, namely His own work and plan for salvation offered to mankind as a free gift by grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Salvation is only free to man because Jesus Christ paid such a high price. And although we do not normally think of God Himself suffering, God the Father personally suffered by punishing to the last extraction of retribution His innocent Son whom He loved eternally. God the Father needed to torture His innocent Son for something He did not do in order to be able to offer salvation freely to guilty mankind. It was the only way salvation could be made available to mankind. So salvation was not free. God suffered for man, and now man can have a free gift of salvation from God through Jesus Christ. And it is the only way.

The Trinity

A central tenet of Christianity is that God is a Trinity, and we worship God as being one God in three Persons. Both New and Old Testaments confirm this issue. It is a hard concept for us to understand, which is not surprising given that we are mere mortals trying to understand God Himself. This doctrine has confounded believers for a long time. But the Trinity can be understood, at least to a much better degree which enables better understanding of God and therefore enhanced love, appreciation and worship of Him.

The Trinity means God is three separate and distinct Persons sharing the same exact essence or qualities of being. God is one in essence and three in Persons – each member perfect and co-equal to the other members. When God acts, He always acts in unison as one God, and it is impossible for God as a Trinity to act in any other way but as one in unison. Therefore God in Trinity is three in personality but one in unity of actions. God must be One since He is perfection, and there is nothing higher, better, or more comprehensive than perfection, meaning there can be nothing above Him including any single member of the Trinity. And each of the three members of the Trinity cannot be less than any of the other members since each exists as perfection, and there can be nothing lower than perfection which can be called God. Therefore each member of the Trinity is exactly the same and equal in essential qualities to the others, however they are not each other. God has three separate self-consciousnesses, with three separate identities called the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So the key issue in understanding the Trinity is to realize that God has three separate and distinct consciousnesses and personalities each possessing the same exact qualities of divinity. Therefore the three members of the Trinity are not three separate Gods, but rather three separate perfect Persons who make up one single perfect God. The exactness of the three members in essence means God is one God, which can only be possible in a state of perfection, which defines God. The three members of the Trinity have existed together eternally, and they have existed in unity. It is this matter of unity which brings the three separate perfect Persons into a single God. Therefore the overarching explanation of the Trinity is that God is three separate and distinct perfect Persons who exist together in perfect unity but with separate consciousnesses and division of responsibilities toward created creatures.

As a Trinity God shares mutual love, shared consciousness, conversation, humor and other traits enabling God to have a perfect relationship with Himself as a perfect Being in three Persons.

Everything about God is and has always been perfect. Perhaps the most succinct verses in the Bible covering the three members of the Trinity are:

Matthew 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . .”

1 Peter 1:2 “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: may grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”

And although the Old Testament does not make the issue of the Trinity as clear as the New Testament, it quotes God as saying "Let us" do this or that as in Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.” God would not use "us" and “our” about Himself if not for the Trinity. And the Hebrew word for God is plural (Elohim). But as with many Old Testament issues, it left the details to the New Testament.

The three separate designations called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit show how God has divided tasks among the single Person of God, and how He relates to His created beings. But the nomenclature does not designate superiority or inferiority among the Trinity. Each is equal perfection. However they have divided the tasks among themselves in order to define how God interfaces with the creatures He created. But it is a fallacy to say God only describes Himself as a Trinity in His dealings with creatures so they can understand Him better. God was a Trinity before any creature ever existed, and did not become a Trinity after creatures came on the scene.

One of the stumbling blocks to understanding the Trinity is that man thinks in terms of time, with one moment following another in sequence. God is not limited by time. God is eternal existence. God lives in an “eternal now” apart from time. This means He can be anywhere in the expanse of time at any moment, and can be at all moments in time at the same time. Because of this, the three members of the Trinity always know what each other is thinking, so their three separate consciousnesses are shared even though separate. This also makes their three separate personalities shared even though separate. This sharing of consciousnesses and personalities is a key aspect of the oneness of God.

Many have tried and failed to develop an analogy to the Trinity based on things humans understand. None can provide an accurate enough view to be useful. Since all end up failing to convey an accurate and useful analogy they are ignored here. There is a good reason why the Bible does not use analogies about the Trinity when it uses many analogies about other issues.

The Trinity of God is a requirement of perfection which defines the Being of God. God could not have perfect love unless He had someone perfect and worthy to love. The three members of the Trinity have this perfect love for each other, completing a requirement of God to be perfect love. So it is shared perfect love which makes the Trinity a requirement of God Himself since three members of the Trinity are required to share a perfect love, and that love could not be shared unless there was someone else on their same level. Creatures do not count since they had to be created long after God existed, and they also are not capable of the full and perfect love God deserves. A singular God without a Trinity could not share perfect love. God must share His perfect love, and that is only possible in Trinity. It is therefore love which requires God to be a Trinity, since a singular God would be unloved, and could not share perfect love on His own level. Instead of wondering why God is a Trinity, the right question should be how could God be anything but a Trinity?

Moses asked God His name when God commissioned him to be the spokesman to the Jewish people. "Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14). The meaning behind this name is that God is the eternally existing One. It is the name which is transliterated YAHWEH or Jehovah (Lord). Each member of the Trinity is called by this name in the Bible, but it is primarily used for the Son since He is the revealed member of the Trinity.

As a general overview of the separate functions of the Trinity, the Father is the planner and director, the Holy Spirit provides the empowerment and is the member who provides many behind the scenes actions, and the Son is always the revealed member of the Trinity to mankind. The Bible clearly shows the Father as the source of direction and planning for the Trinity to follow, but He has never appeared to man directly. The Holy Spirit renovated the earth prior to the creation of man, empowered miraculous actions of prophets and others, activates salvation after acceptance, and provides numerous

other actions. As such, the Holy Spirit is the behind-the-scenes mover and empowering member of the Trinity, and is also never seen by man. The Son is the revealed member of the Trinity to mankind. In all of the Old Testament when individuals or Israel as a nation interfaced with God they were interfacing with the same member of the Trinity, and it was always the member called the Son, who later came to earth as Jesus Christ. It was the Son who spoke with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, who spoke with Noah about the ark, who spoke with Abraham, and spoke to Moses from the burning bush and on Mount Sinai to provide the Ten Commandments, was in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle and Temple, and so on. Therefore the individual members of the Trinity generally divide their tasks in these ways, but they always act as a Trinity in absolute unison of purpose and agreement.

The three members of the Trinity have existed together eternally, and they have existed in unity. Jesus Christ did not become a separate member of the Trinity at the time of His human birth, but rather existed eternally as a member of the Trinity called the Son and took on human form to be the only God-Man. Jesus Christ referred to Himself as the "I AM" several times during His earthly ministry, showing He had always been part of the Trinity. "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58) Jesus declared that He had existed eternally even though He was also born some 30 years before He made that statement. God's plan for the salvation of mankind was to have a member of the Trinity take on humanity and pay for the sins of all mankind, allowing God to offer salvation through faith in the God-Man Jesus Christ. God Himself could not pay for the sins of mankind. God required a human to pay for mankind's sins. The eternal member of the Trinity called God the Son chose to take on true humanity alongside His eternally existing deity and pay for the sins of mankind as Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Savior) who was prophesied in the Old Testament. The union was more than God inside a body, but rather God and man combined into one person as the only God-Man, with the consciousness of the Trinity Son and also the soul consciousness of a true human co-existing together. God the Son became the most unique member of the Trinity when He remained truly God yet also took on human form. Jesus Christ had to be truly God and truly man at the same time, and once He became the God-Man He remains that way forever. Jesus Christ the Son of God is now in a resurrection body, and it is the same type of body all human believers will eventually have after they have been resurrected. 1 Timothy 6:15 says of this body "the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see." Salvation would not be possible for mankind without the Trinity dividing tasks, with the humanity of the Son

bearing the punishment on behalf of all mankind, the Father doing the punishment of the Son's humanity, and the Holy Spirit providing a sustaining ministry for the humanity of the Son. The Father had to punish the God-Man Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind, and this would not have been possible without the Trinity's division of tasks. And the Holy Spirit empowers and supports the overall plan of God the Father throughout human history, which would also not be possible without the Trinity.

There are many more divisions of tasks among the Trinity over the various Ages of time. The Son created the original universe and all in it. Colossians 1:16 says speaking of Jesus Christ "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him." The Holy Spirit restored the universe in preparation for man's occupancy of earth (Genesis 1:2). The Father is the planner, having planned all of time from the beginning to the end. The Son provided the Ten Commandments and other scriptures to Moses on the mountain (Exodus 34). The Son was the one who dwelt in the Tabernacle and Temple Holy of Holies in Israel, and was in the pillar of fire and the cloud by day as the Israelites traveled out of captivity. The Holy Spirit empowers Church Age believers and enables learning of the deep concepts of the Scriptures. The Father provides overall direction for the Trinity to follow. The Holy Spirit restrains fallen angels from interfering with mankind to unacceptable degrees, and protects the earth from the destructive activities of Satan and fallen angels. The Son judges angels and man when it is required. These are just some of the many tasks which have been divided among the Trinity.

One of the more accurate scholarly approaches to the Trinity is contained in the Athanasian Creed:

"That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit... And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are co-eternal, and coequal."

The picture many people have of God is as an old curmudgeon; namely a stern, scowling, harsh and dictatorial overseer who places unreasonable demands on mortals and judges quickly anyone who gets out of line. That could not be farther from the truth. God is a God of love, and He loves sharing what He has, and wants to save and bless every person who is ever born. God's requirements are not burdensome, and He does not have very high expectations for man. He has done the hard work of providing salvation by doing the unthinkable thing of judging His Son on the cross. This took great effort on God's part to take the sin issue out of the way, making it no longer a barrier for the salvation of any person. All man needs to do is to say "yes" to all God offers, starting with salvation, and then in the spiritual life. However God cannot ignore any part of His essence, especially His righteousness which places the requirement for accepting salvation on sinful man so God can have a relationship with each one. That is what salvation is all about, namely enabling God to have a relationship with mankind without violating any portion of His perfect essence. When He is forced to judge, He does so as a last resort. God wants man to share His happiness. He did not create man just to have someone to judge. If man lacks blessing, it is because man does not enable God to grant the blessings He wants to share, first salvation, and then as part of the spiritual life of the believer. God Himself suffered unimaginably when Christ as a member of the Trinity was judged on the cross in place of man. Jesus Christ was personally judged by God the Father on the cross, and the cost to God was beyond measure. Why would He do such a thing if not totally loving, giving, and gracious to man? He would not.

The Trinity means God is one God in three separate and distinct persons. These three Persons are each exactly the same in essence, but with different personalities. It is love which requires God to be a Trinity, since a singular God would be unloved, and could not share perfect love on His own level. One premise of deciphering the truth among various options is that the hardest option to reconcile is usually true. No other religion believes in the Trinity. Only the Bible reveals such information, both New and Old Testaments, and it is the only source of truth about God. Others are taking the easy road to untruth, and by doing so do not find God. We take the harder road and live by faith that what God says is true. And why should God be easy for mortals to understand? If He were easy to understand, that would be a problem much greater than comprehending the Trinity.

The Humanity–Deity Relationship Of Jesus Christ

We worship Jesus Christ as the only God-Man who was born on earth to provide salvation. Jesus Christ was truly human in every way. Jesus Christ also was and remains truly God, and as such He existed forever as a member of the Trinity. At birth, Jesus Christ became true humanity and was at that moment also the same God the Son who had existed eternally. Jesus Christ was not something halfway between God and man, some demi-god or angel or superman or anything else. He was fully human and truly God, having the consciousness of both in one unique person. The interaction between the two natures of Jesus Christ during His time on earth was personal, not simply an indwelling of deity inside His human body, or deity possessing His humanity. His humanity and deity were interactive yet not mixed. However, there was a limitation placed on the interactions during His earthly ministry to ensure Jesus Christ was able to experience true humanity, including suffering. His humanity had to be completely human in every way to provide salvation, and His deity could not be less than perfect God. Yet these two came together in the unique God-Man Jesus Christ for the purpose of providing salvation for sinful mankind.

Jesus was born just the same as Adam was created by God, perfect humanity with no sinful nature. Every other human throughout history has been born with the sinful nature passed down from Adam as a curse given to him by God after his fall in the Garden. That is because Adam sinned knowing what he was doing, but Eve sinned after being deceived by Satan. Therefore God made Adam the responsible party and the source of passing down the sinful nature. Adam's sinful nature was passed down to all his descendants except for Jesus Christ whose birth was not tied back to Adam. The supernatural conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit meant He had no human father (no male DNA was involved in His conception) so He was not a descendant of Adam for the purpose of passing down a sinful nature. Romans 5:12 says: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people.....¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Jesus did not receive the sinful nature passed down from Adam. Jesus is called the "Last Adam" as I Corinthians 15:45 says: "So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit." And Romans 5:18 says when Adam sinned all sinned:

“Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.” Therefore the first thing we know about the humanity of Jesus Christ is that He was perfect humanity without a sinful nature, but otherwise His humanity was just like any other human being. In other words, He was fully human, but capable of avoiding sin unlike all other humans since He had no sinful nature. Even so, He was capable of sinning if He would choose to do so, although an extreme temptation would need to come from outside of Himself, not from a sinful nature on the inside. Every other creation of a souled being from God had fallen through sin apart from a sinful nature, both angels and man. A key to the salvation of man was, would Jesus Christ do the same and choose to sin and therefore fall, or would He remain sinless and choose to go to the cross and pay the price required by God to redeem mankind from sin? Fortunately for us, Jesus Christ did not fall, and He also chose to sacrifice Himself for all mankind on the cross.

One of the deeper issues regarding Jesus is that His humanity side did not have access to His deity side in some key aspects. Even though the union was personal, it was walled-off in many ways. Philippians 2:7 says Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men.” The “emptying” refers to the deity of Jesus Christ, although fully part of the complete person of Jesus Christ, and personally interconnected with His humanity into His single personage, the deity side was "emptied" and remained in the background during His time on earth and did not participate in any part of His human existence except to commune with the humanity side, but without helping it. Therefore His deity side was personally in union with the humanity side, but did not interfere with or assist the humanity side. This is the most important issue to understand with regard to the humanity-deity relationship of Christ, that although it was personal, it was limited in transference of information and power from the deity side to the humanity side.

Therefore the humanity side of Jesus did not know what His omniscient deity side knew during His earthly ministry. His humanity was therefore not omniscient since it did not have access to the omniscience of His own deity. This is because the deity side was "emptied" from Jesus Christ for the purpose of ensuring Jesus Christ would be truly human in every way so He would be qualified to provide salvation. Any information of a non-human knowledge type came through the Holy Spirit, but that was measured out on an as-needed basis, generally as prophecies and other important information. Only His deity side was omniscient, knowing everything about everything. On His humanity side He

was born a blank slate, with no knowledge about anything. Jesus was born with no knowledge just as with any newborn baby, and His human brain needed to develop to a certain level before it could have advanced levels of understanding. He was born needing to learn everything He would come to know as a human being, and His deity never imparted any information at any time directly to His humanity. His humanity and deity never mixed. And neither side was diminished. Therefore He had to learn everything just as any other human does. Jesus had to learn about the Old Testament scriptures and was taught by others and even by angels as occurred for prophets during Old Testament times. At age twelve He was viewed as precocious but not omniscient in His humanity. Luke 2:46 says: “After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished.” But Jesus was not conversing in the Temple from His omniscient deity side, but from His humanity side, as Luke 2:52 says "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Deity never learns anything or grows in knowledge or wisdom. Jesus also had to learn all the human skills he acquired. He learned to walk and talk and tie on His sandals and read and so on just like any other human must. He learned carpentry from his step-father Joseph. He grew up and learned most things as any person does. Everything He knew He learned from sources other than His own deity since His humanity did not have any co-knowledge from His deity side. But He did have knowledge not possessed by most humans. Angels taught Him some things, and the Holy Spirit revealed certain information to Him just as with the prophets of the Old Testament. But He never learned anything from His own deity. Nothing.

There was a reason for that, of course. His deity remained in the background during the life of Jesus so salvation could be accomplished by a true human as was required to meet the demands of God the Father as payment for the sins of mankind. Recall that Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men.” The deity of Jesus Christ remained in the background during His time on earth and did not participate in His human experience, however His deity was there as a part of Him and the two natures communed on a non-interference level. This was not limited to omniscience, but also included all other powers of deity including omnipotence. The human side of Jesus Christ needed to be in all ways truly human, suffering all things humans suffer, needing to learn everything He would know instead of being omniscient from His deity side, making His own human decisions to refrain from sin, having to live under His own human powers except for

what the Holy Spirit authorized, and ultimately to accept the guilt of sin for all mankind and go to the cross to pay for those sins as a true human who could fully suffer. The omnipotence of His deity could not interfere. He also had to be able to fail and sin, meaning He had to be allowed to choose for or against God's plan for Him. He could not be unduly influenced by His deity in any way, otherwise the free will of the humanity of Jesus Christ would have been compromised. The mission of Jesus to provide salvation for the human race required the deity side to remain out of sight, in the background, and not influence or assist the human side in any way that might push or aid His volition to make any decision regarding fulfilling the Father's mission for Him, and especially the salvation mission which was the highest priority for Jesus Christ while on earth.

His deity was not allowed to lessen the suffering of Jesus during His life, including all forms of normal human suffering, and especially the suffering which occurred while on the cross providing salvation. The full wrath of God the Father had to be experienced by the humanity side, and the deity side could not interfere. Without the actual suffering of Jesus Christ there would have been no redemption, since the perfect righteousness of God required full payment in suffering for all the sins of humanity. It could not be a pseudo-suffering where the deity of Jesus Christ shielded His humanity from actual suffering from the torture imposed on Him by God the Father while He was on the cross. The same was also true for daily issues such as hunger, thirst, cold, heat, fatigue, or common pains, whereby His deity was not allowed by the plan of the Father to interfere. Jesus had to be allowed to suffer as a true human. Hebrews 4:15 says "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." Jesus Christ could use His humanity to influence His deity in certain restricted ways, but not vice versa. His deity remained out of the way, in the background, uninvolved, but still personally present as an integral part of the whole Person of Jesus Christ.

The deepest questions about the interactions of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ revolve around whether the deity of Jesus Christ performed any actions while Jesus Christ was on earth, most specifically, did His deity do the healing or perform the other miracles? Or were these accomplished by the Holy Spirit who also indwelt Jesus Christ? The humanity of Jesus was indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which was not like the deity of Jesus Christ which was truly part of His whole person. We know that as the God-Man, Jesus was sustained by the Holy Spirit, not by His own deity. And regarding the

power behind the miracles and healing, sources in the Bible reveal important clues. Jesus declared that He was unable to accomplish miracles on His own. In John 5:19 Jesus said “The Son can do nothing of Himself”; and in vs30 He added “I can of myself do nothing.” Jesus also made it clear He cast out demons using the power of the Holy Spirit, not His own divine power when he said “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come to you.” (Matthew 12:28) Other passages also show the power used by Jesus Christ while on earth was the power of the Holy Spirit. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed...” (Acts 10:38). John the Baptist said of Jesus “For God does not give [Him] the Spirit by measure” (John 3:34). John 14:10 says “But the Father who dwells in me does the works.” Acts 2:22 “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know”. Therefore God the Father did the works through the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:20). After the earthly ministry of Jesus was finished, the disciples healed, cast out demons, and performed miracles in the same way Jesus Christ had done, also using the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples they would do even greater works than He did (John 14:12). Jesus said His disciples would have the same Holy Spirit to work in their lives (John 16:7). Peter raised Dorcas from the dead using the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:36-41).

Therefore we know that the power of the Holy Spirit was the source of power for Jesus, and also for the disciples and Apostles. Jesus did not use the power of His own deity to perform any miracle, or to know anything which was not humanly knowable. Whenever Jesus healed others, performed miracles, cast out demons, prophesied, had knowledge not available to His humanity and accomplished many other divinely powered acts He was using the power of the Holy Spirit, not using His own deity. Remember, Philippians 2:7 says Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, being made in the likeness of men.” The “emptying” means that He did not use His own deity in any way at any time for any purpose while on earth. He was empowered and sustained by the Holy Spirit, performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit, healed others by the power of the Holy Spirit, received prophetic information through the power of the Holy Spirit, and knew unknowable things by the Holy Spirit. None of these were accomplished using His own deity. This was absolutely necessary to ensure He lived a fully human life so He could provide our salvation as a true human. His deity could not interfere or aid His humanity in the process. But this does not diminish the fact that He was fully deity as well as fully human. His deity simply remained in the background and did not interfere.

An instructive Bible reference described how Jesus felt power going out of Him when a woman touched His clothes and was healed without His knowledge:

Luke 8:40 “Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. ⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house ⁴² because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. ⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ “Who touched me?” Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.” ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.” ⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

This reveals some clues about the interrelationship between His humanity and deity, and how His humanity knew power had gone out from the Holy Spirit, but Jesus' humanity did not know why or where or for what reason. He had to ask others around Him and be told who received the results of the power. The humanity side of Jesus was not omniscient, and only knew what He learned in a human way or when the Holy Spirit revealed something to Him which was otherwise unknown. This is a glimpse into how the deity and humanity of the God-Man interacted without the deity side providing any information or power to His humanity side.

Late in His ministry Jesus told His disciples about the timing of the Second Advent: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Jesus admitted that He did not know the timing of His own Second Advent, which His deity side certainly knew. Once again we see how the human side did not have access to the knowledge of the deity side. When prophetic information was revealed to Jesus, it came from the Holy Spirit as such information was required, and He was not told everything. And nothing came from His own deity.

Jesus knew He was deity and stated so, but He refrained from ever directly saying “I am God” because that would have brought on instant stoning from the Jewish religious leaders of the time, and He could

not die in that way. He had to get to the cross and provide salvation, and therefore had to avoid being stoned to death, as will be explained further shortly. Jesus stated His divinity in the following ways:

John 8:58: "Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

John 10:30: "I and the Father are one."

John 17:5: "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

John 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

Mark 14:61: "But He kept silent "Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

We know that Jesus Christ was deity because He said He was, because the name of God is attributed to Him, because the attributes of God are assigned to Him, because He was to be worshiped as God, and because Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and references to the Messiah who was prophesied as the God-Man.

As the God-Man Jesus lived a fully human experience and did not use His divine nature to improve the quality of His life or reduce the suffering on His human side. Jesus needed to experience what other humans experience, namely pain, hunger, need, neglect, and all types of human suffering, both physical and mental. "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18). "And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? " (Mark 9:12). "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil

said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." (Luke 4:1-3). "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (I Peter 2:21). "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." (John 12:27).

The ability of the humanity of Jesus to choose against God's plan was shown by the temptations of Satan which He refused, but the main test was going to the cross to be judged for the sins of all mankind, for which He was not guilty. His internal anxiety over the cross and the prayer which He prayed on the Mount of Olives in the days before His crucifixion showed the cross was not an absolute certainty for Jesus, but rather a choice Jesus had to make for Himself from His own humanity:

Luke 22:39 "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

Jesus knew what was required of Him, and that it would be the hardest thing anyone was ever required to do in all history. Jesus had to do this willingly, of His own human volition, and apart from His own divine nature's influence or interference.

So why was this limited interaction and lack of knowledge sharing between His two natures, divine and human, necessary? Until Jesus Christ fulfilled His salvation ministry, He was fully free to reject the cross. The humanity of Jesus Christ was fully capable of sin and rejection of God's will and plan for Him, even though it would take an act of extreme will on His part. Therefore the deity of Jesus Christ could not be completely fused with His humanity in every way until after the cross since the humanity could have rejected the plan of God, which would have required His deity to separate from His fallen humanity. The humanity of Jesus having truly free will had to make every decision without undue influence from His deity. This was because the salvation mission was an essentially human one, not one of His divine nature. The divine nature of Jesus Christ had to remain "emptied" and in the

background and therefore not unduly influence the humanity's free will. Salvation depended on this separation.

Therefore, the interaction between deity and humanity was very limited while on earth until after the cross which was His main mission, and then resurrection provided a body suited for a fully integrated humanity and deity. While on earth and until His resurrection the interrelationship between His humanity and deity remained as described above. But after His resurrection the "emptying" of His deity ceased, and interrelationship between the humanity and deity sides changed to become fully interconnected, with both sides being in unison on all areas of knowledge, power, capabilities, decisions and thinking. Once salvation was a completed task and Jesus Christ was resurrected into an eternal body the restrictions on the interactions between His humanity and deity were removed, although His humanity and deity will always and forever be separate consciousnesses since they cannot be mixed. Before the cross the deity of Jesus Christ had to remain in the background, a part of His person but also potentially separable from His person. But once salvation was a completed fact, and therefore His mission was completed, the two natures of Jesus Christ, although forever remaining humanity and deity, became fully fused and totally intertwined in an unrestricted manner in His resurrection body. After the resurrection, the fusing of interactions between humanity and deity in the person of Jesus Christ became complete, total and forever, since His new body was now capable of supporting a fused deity and humanity. After resurrection His divine consciousness and human soul remain unmixed but now completely interconnected in every way. All thoughts of the resurrected Jesus Christ are now one thought, and all actions are now one action, and all power one power from a fully integrated deity and humanity acting in complete harmony, meaning at resurrection He became the unrestricted God-Man Jesus Christ, glorified in a resurrection body, forever.

It helps us understand the interrelationship between the humanity and deity sides of Jesus Christ if we look at His two advents, which have two types of deity-humanity interactions. During His First Advent His mission was to provide salvation, which required His deity to remain in the background while His humanity completed the mission. After salvation was completed and He was in His eternal resurrection body, the interrelationship changed into the eternal status where the two natures, although eternally separate, became fully fused and completely interconnected. Jesus Christ will return to earth at the Second Advent and institute the Millennial Kingdom and reign as King of the earth for 1000 years.

During this second time on the earth Jesus Christ will not have the restrictions put on Him during the First Advent, when His mission was to provide salvation and required Him to suffer as a true human. During the First Advent He was the suffering servant, but when He returns He will be the King of Kings during the Millennium and will use His fully integrated God-Man powers, knowledge and capabilities. There will no longer be a need for the Holy Spirit to perform the divine acts for Him or to sustain Him, since in His human resurrection body His deity is already fully fused and completely integrated with His humanity. So we see that the interaction between the humanity of Jesus Christ and His divine nature has permanently changed since His resurrection and ascension to heaven.

This understanding of our Lord and Savior enhances our appreciation for what He did for us while on earth during the First Advent. His suffering before the cross was very real and fully human since His deity did not interfere. His suffering on the cross, the worst suffering of all time by any human, was very real and fully human. He did not pretend to suffer while using His deity to diminish it or separate Him from it. Rather, His salvation ministry was based on bearing the totality of suffering for the sins of the entire human race, and suffering the complete unfiltered wrath of the Father “in His own body on the tree.” (1Peter 2:24) The interrelationship between His humanity and deity, although personal and intimate, was very limited until after salvation was completed. This is because Jesus Christ had to be fully human and experience the cross as fully and truly human in order to provide salvation for mankind. After the cross and resurrection the limitations on deity-humanity interaction were lifted, and although He will always have both natures, the humanity of Jesus Christ in resurrection body and His perfect undiminished deity became fully interconnected and completely fused for all eternity, including during His return to earth to rule during the Millennium.

The Earthly Ministry of Jesus

Some may wonder why the earthly ministry of Jesus is included as a difficult subject area of the Bible. After all, the sequence of events in the life of Christ seem fairly easy to understand. But what is not so easy to understand is why He taught the way He taught, why His teachings were so limited, and why He avoided teaching many important issues entirely. For instance, many Christians do not understand why Jesus placed such an enormous emphasis on discussing "the Kingdom" or even understand what the Kingdom meant, and this subject represented a significant part of His teachings. It is also difficult to understand why He used so many parables to teach and why He often answered questions indirectly. And He never discussed the Church Age or its principles even though the disciples would become part of the Church just a few short weeks after the cross and would need to establish the Church and write the Epistles. Since eleven of the future Apostles spent three and a half years with Jesus, it might seem odd that Jesus never taught or even mentioned a single Church Age principle or doctrine to them during that entire time. In fact, Jesus kept the Church Age hidden from the disciples. Wouldn't it have been a good idea to prepare the disciples for the Church Age since they would very shortly be required to change from being followers to being leaders, and lead those who had put their faith in Jesus Christ? And why was the Church Age hidden from them? Of course, there were very good reasons for all of this, so these questions have answers.

Understanding these issues requires an examination of the limitations placed on Jesus during the First Advent by God the Father, which required Jesus to teach within fairly narrow boundaries for His earthly ministry. Those narrow boundaries are the primary difficult issues which must be addressed, and is the focus of this chapter. A reasonable question would be why such limitations were placed on the God-Man, and why He was not allowed by the Father to teach whatever He wanted to teach. This is where the word "mystery" is used by the Bible itself to explain the reasons for the limitations on the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. But why all the mystery? As we will discover, the issues involve one of the biggest mysteries of all time, which even Jesus Christ was not allowed to reveal while He was on earth. But first some background information is required to set the stage for these rather complex discussions.

Jesus lived on earth for just over 36 years from 4 BC to AD 33. In case it is news, the early calendar folks got the birth date wrong when they set the start of AD 1 incorrectly, and we have lived with that calendar error ever since. The first 33 years were preparation since He had to learn most of what He came to know. As previously discussed Jesus' humanity did not have access to the omniscience of His own deity. Then the last 3 1/2 years was the time of His ministry and accomplishment of His main mission which was highly focused on two issues: 1) removing the sin barrier between God and mankind allowing salvation to be offered through Him to all, and 2) offering the promised Kingdom to the Jews.

In the last chapter we discussed how Jesus Christ was born true humanity and also deity. His deity existed eternally as God the Son and became part of the union at birth. His human soul and mortal body were just like any other person except He had no sinful nature. This was essential for Jesus to be an acceptable sacrifice for the sin of mankind, that He must be born true humanity but without a sinful nature, and must never sin during His life. The sinful nature of man is passed down from Adam to all his descendants, however Jesus Christ was miraculously conceived so He did not have a sinful nature, and therefore He had no temptations from within. But He could have sinned and fallen just as Satan and Adam had fallen previously. This was the purpose of Satan's temptations of Jesus at the beginning of His earthly ministry, to see if Jesus could be externally tempted into sin even though He had no sinful nature. But since He remained sinless He never acquired a sinful nature, making Him qualified to be the sacrifice for sin and therefore the Savior who would remove the sin barrier between God and mankind through His sacrificial work on the cross.

The early life of Jesus was one of continual study of Old Testament scriptures. This was a time of intense focus on preparation for His ministry, and He was kept out of the spotlight until He was fully prepared and the timing was right. He is only mentioned one time during His early life when He was twelve years old and impressed the spiritual leaders in the Temple in Jerusalem with His great knowledge of the scriptures. The previous chapter covered the issue that Jesus had to learn everything He knew from birth onward, and that His deity never provided Him with any information. So the Scriptures were learned just like any other person learns and becomes an expert, by intense study.

At the beginning of His earthly ministry Jesus was announced by the herald John the Baptist when John saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus “like a dove” at the Jordan River. John had known Jesus personally all his life since Jesus was John’s cousin, and they were the same age. But John never knew that Jesus was the Messiah until the Holy Spirit revealed it to him that day at the Jordan River. This is the point where the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ began, and it would last about three and a half years.

After Jesus was baptized, not due to sin but as a sign He was leaving the preparation phase behind and changing roles to take on the ministry of the Messiah, God allowed Satan to throw his three best temptations at Jesus. Jesus was first put into a severely weakened state due to lack of food so He would be most vulnerable. God made this a very lopsided test, giving Satan every advantage and opportunity to lure Jesus away from His mission.

Matthew 4:1 “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” 4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”

Jesus was severely weakened by lack of food, making Him close to starvation and both physically and mentally very weak. God the Father wanted it this way to allow Satan to have his best shot at tempting Jesus so there could be no question that God had given Satan maximum opportunity to support the appeal of his sentence to the Lake of Fire. Satan was trying to show that Jesus would fall into sin when tempted just like Satan and Adam had done, and that Jesus was no different. Satan hoped that even the

perfect Jesus Christ would sin if given the right opportunity and motivation, which in turn would show that Satan should not be put into the Lake of Fire even though God had already judged and sentenced him. This would also stop the salvation ministry of Jesus by preventing Him from going to the cross to be the sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and these temptations were part of that plan. It was no matter to Satan that this would result in all mankind being condemned eternally as long as it enabled him to escape his own sentence.

The temptations of Satan were pure genius, as one might expect. Give the devil his due. The test for Jesus to turn stones into bread was more subtle than it appears on the surface. Jesus was very close to starving to death, so He was near to delirium and very weak. Beyond the surface level of the test related to extreme hunger, Satan was trying to get Jesus to ignore the will of God regarding what power He would use. As discussed in the previous chapter, the humanity side of Jesus was not allowed to access the power of His own deity to eliminate His suffering. Instead, He had to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, and that power was being withheld for the purpose of this test. So the real test was to see if Jesus would ignore God's plan and go to His own deity and perform a miracle apart from God's will for Him, which Jesus was prohibited from doing during His entire earthly ministry since the power of His deity was "emptied" from use. Jesus was therefore tempted to not only deal with His extreme hunger to prevent starvation, but also was tempted to show Satan that He was more powerful than Satan. If Jesus had used His own divine power to feed Himself to eliminate His extreme hunger and also show Satan His real power it would have been a sin since it would have violated the Father's requirements placed on Jesus during the First Advent. Essentially, the "emptied" deity side would have needed to be "unemptied", which was not allowed by the Father.

In the second test Satan tempted Jesus to throw himself down from the top of the Temple and show how the angels would save Him from harm. Satan even misquoted a Bible verse to try to induce Jesus to jump off the Temple. The misquoted verse from Psalm 91:11-12 actually says: "For he will command his angels concerning you *to guard you in all your ways*; 12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Satan left out the part in italics. In this temptation Satan was implying to Jesus that since He had come out of obscurity and looked and acted like any other human, He would need to show in some spectacular way that He was the real Messiah, unlike many fakers who had come before Him. The prophesy said the angels would protect the true

Messiah, and Jesus certainly wanted to be accepted as the Messiah. Satan was essentially asking Jesus "Don't you have enough faith to trust God and His angels?" So Satan questioned the faith of Jesus, and also suggested He must do something spectacular to distinguish Himself from other people, and why not do it at the Temple with a large crowd watching? Satan taunted that this would jump-start the ministry of Jesus and prove who He was, and short cut all the time that would be required otherwise; and wouldn't that be good for His ministry? Wouldn't more people believe in Him and be saved? But Jesus saw through this, that God does not allow us to engage in reckless behavior in order to test God regarding His faithfulness. So Jesus replied "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Additionally, this was a second attempt to get Jesus to use His own divine power to save Himself if the angels did not, which was likely since Jesus would have been outside the will of the Father if He had jumped.

The third test struck at the heart of Jesus' ministry regarding salvation. Jesus understood that He as the Messiah would need to bear the punishment and suffering for the sins of all mankind as the Old Testament revealed. This was something Jesus desperately wanted to avoid if at all possible, even though it was prophesied by Isaiah. Just over three years later on the day He was to be arrested and sent to the cross Jesus prayed intensely about bearing the sins of the world: "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39) Jesus did not want to pay the price required to save mankind since it would be the worst punishment anyone would ever endure. Additionally, the Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would rule the earth during the Millennial Kingdom. Satan's ingenious temptation was to offer Jesus world rulership without going to the cross to achieve it. It was a legitimate offer since Satan gained rulership of the earth at the fall of Adam, so it was Satan's world to offer. The temptation was that Jesus could accept Satan's offer and avoid the cross, and become world ruler right away. No cross, no suffering, just instant power and rulership over the earth. But the catch was that Jesus would be required to worship Satan, and become part of his evil kingdom. Jesus rejected the offer in spite of full knowledge that He would be required to suffer horribly for the sins of the entire world in order to eventually become world ruler during the Millennium under God's plan.

These three temptations from Satan were subtle and ingenious. They hit Jesus at His presumed weak points at a time when Jesus was physically and mentally in a severely weakened state, literally very

near to death from starvation. In fact, angels needed to nurse Him back to health after the temptations were complete, as Matthew 4:11 says "Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him." Jesus passed each test by relying on His knowledge of Scripture and His faith in the Father's plan. And He did all of this without the help of His own deity. That was the real test, to see if Jesus would turn to His deity and use His own power in a manner prohibited by God's plan. He was tempted to use His deity in several ways, first to end His extreme suffering from hunger, then to show Satan He was more powerful while also proving to the people gathered at the Temple that He was the Messiah, and finally to take rulership of the world immediately instead of going to the cross.

After the temptation issue was resolved, Jesus began His earthly ministry. It was almost AD 30 and He had only 3 1/2 years before He must provide salvation by offering Himself as a sacrifice on the cross. Time was short, and there was much to do. The ministry of Jesus was therefore compressed and intense. This brings us to the primary point of this chapter, which is to understand what He taught, why He taught the way He taught, and why He avoided teaching many important issues entirely. In our overview we touched on these issues, and are now ready to explore them in detail. For instance, why did Jesus place such an enormous emphasis on discussing "the Kingdom," and what is it? Why did He use so many parables to teach, and why did He not discuss Church Age principles since the Church would begin just a few short weeks after the cross? Why didn't Jesus prepare His disciples to be leaders in the Church Age since He was leaving them behind and these disciples would become Apostles to the Church?

Understanding these issues begins with an examination of the limitations placed on Jesus during the First Advent by God the Father, which required Jesus to teach within fairly narrow boundaries for His earthly ministry. Those narrow boundaries are a difficult issue which must be addressed first. It is also where the word "mystery" is used by the Bible itself to explain the reasons for the limitations on the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. It was one of the biggest mysteries of all time, which even Jesus Christ was not allowed to reveal while He was on earth. The 3 1/2 years of Jesus' ministry and accomplishment of His main mission focused on two specific issues, namely 1) removing the sin barrier between God and mankind allowing salvation to be offered through Him to all, and 2) offering the promised Kingdom to the Jews. The earthly ministry of Jesus must be viewed in the light of these two rather narrow purposes since they defined how He would teach, and what He would teach while on

earth. It also defined what He was restricted from teaching, which is where the mystery comes into play. The plan of God the Father remained laser focused on these two parts of the mission of Christ, and as a result His teaching ministry was also narrowly focused on these two components of His mission. He therefore left the other teachings to those who remained after He was gone, namely the Apostles who would write the epistles of the New Testament which outline the new covenant to the Church, which are the Church Age doctrines and principles believers now live by. But these were never taught by Jesus during His ministry for a very important reason.

The unraveling of these issues first requires a deeper understanding of the mission of Jesus, which we have noted was primarily to provide salvation, which He would accomplish on the cross, and secondly to offer Himself as the King of Israel and institute the Millennial Kingdom promised in the Old Testament. And that was the "Kingdom" Jesus discussed over and over again, namely the Millennial Kingdom which is a 1000 year Age of history when Jesus Christ will rule under perfect environment. The Millennium will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. But everything Jesus did during His earthly ministry must be viewed in light of the two overarching goals for His life on earth, which is the key to understanding why Jesus taught the way He did, and why He never mentioned the Church Age which followed the cross, or taught any Church Age doctrines. Jesus was required by the Father to provide salvation, and His earthly ministry offered Himself as the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. His miracles and teachings therefore showed Him to be the one promised in prophecy. Jesus was also required by the Father to offer the Millennial Kingdom to the Jews of His day, whereby God would implement that Kingdom with Jesus Christ as King. We know that the offer was not accepted by the Jewish leadership, and Jesus was rejected as the King of the Jews, but the Father required the offer to be made in a manner which could have been accepted by the Jews of that day. Therefore Jesus could only teach what supported Old Testament prophecies about the Millennial Kingdom as the next step in history, but only if accepted by the Jews. He therefore presented the offer of the Kingdom to Israel as a legitimate offer which could have been accepted by them at that time, rather than in the future, and did not ever discuss the alternative which would be the Church Age. Teaching anything other than the Kingdom would have led to a contradiction in God's plan, which is not possible.

Therefore Jesus taught the way He did for several reasons. The time during Jesus' earthly ministry was a special time on its own, but still during the Age of Israel. Jesus had to stick with the Old Testament Mosaic Law, and could not teach the new covenant to the Church which was not yet given, and could not be offered at the same time the Kingdom was being offered since the two are mutually exclusive. This is an extremely important point worth repeating, that the Millennial Kingdom and Church Age could not be offered at the same time, only one or the other. Since His ministry was during the Age of Israel He had to legitimately offer the Jews the Kingdom in a way they could accept without creating a disparity among prophecies, and the Church was never mentioned in any prophecy. Therefore God needed to enable Jesus to be accepted as the King by the Jews, and if accepted, proceed into the Kingdom in short order. Because of this, Jesus could only teach what lined up with the possibility of the Jews accepting Him as their King. The Millennial Kingdom was, in essence, the primary plan of God, and was legitimately offered to the Jews of Jesus' time. So the de facto backup plan which was the Church Age could not be discussed or taught until after the Jews had fully rejected Jesus as their Messiah and King, and that rejection was finalized on Palm Sunday during the week of His crucifixion. After the final rejection of Jesus by Israel, the Church Age became the new plan, which was "the mystery" and best kept secret in all the Bible. When that rejection was etched in stone Jesus began to provide a few clues regarding what was coming next, but still never mentioned any details about the coming Church Age which was to be instituted only if the Kingdom was rejected. But after Palm Sunday in AD 33 He was then free to prophesy about the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem by the Romans, since the 490 years promised to Israel in Daniel chapter 7 was complete as of the week of His crucifixion. That started an interim period of time from Palm Sunday until Pentecost which was 50 days after the crucifixion when the Church Age would begin.

We know historically that after Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended to heaven, the Church Age began. But during His entire earthly ministry Jesus never mentioned the Church Age or any of its doctrines since He was required to act and teach as if the Church Age would not happen. The Father required this to remain a mystery, meaning it was never revealed in the Old Testament or by Jesus even though the later times including the Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom had been revealed in prophecies. Jesus could only teach Old Testament principles and offer the Kingdom, which was what was prophesied in the Old Testament. It was only after His death, resurrection and ascension that the Holy Spirit instituted the backup plan, the mystery Age which was the Church Age. Eleven of the

disciples became Apostles, and Paul was added, then the Holy Spirit gave those Apostles the Church Age principles and doctrines to write down and teach. But during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ He offered the main plan until it was rejected, and could not discuss the Church because that would have been incompatible with the legitimate offer of the Millennial Kingdom, and incompatible with Old Testament prophecies. This provides the main reason why Jesus taught the way He did, why He taught what He taught, and why He did not prepare the disciples for the coming Church Age or teach any of its concepts or doctrines.

Since Jesus could not and did not take on the task of revealing the Church Age He told His disciples before His crucifixion “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things...” (John 14:6) meaning the Church Age doctrines, even though they did not understand what He meant. Therefore Jesus’ earthly ministry stuck to the issues He was sent to offer, first salvation, and secondly the Kingdom. Jesus taught the Kingdom in everything He preached to the masses and to the disciples. This explains why the disciples were so confused when the Kingdom did not occur. It is also why Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, because he felt that Jesus had betrayed the disciples by not instituting the Millennial Kingdom, and by not making them Princes in the Kingdom at that time, but instead seemed to depart from the promises of the Kingdom they had heard for the preceding several years. But the Jewish leaders had rejected the Kingdom which Jesus had offered, a fine point which Judas missed. As a result Judas betrayed Jesus out of a sense of bitterness over what he viewed to be a bait and switch message from Jesus. Judas and the other disciples did not understand the difficult and narrow message of Jesus' earthly ministry, that He must only offer the Kingdom, but that the Jews could reject it. And once it was rejected, a backup plan had to replace it. But Jesus stuck with the Old Testament prophecies no matter what the Jews decided, and He did so right up to the end even though it thoroughly confused His disciples. It was necessary to ensure the prophecies of the Bible were not compromised in any way.

The great "mystery" was that the Church Age was not God's primary plan, but rather God wanted Israel to accept Jesus Christ as King and have Israel serve as His chosen people once again in a regathered nation of Israel under the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the Millennial Kingdom. But either way the cross had to occur first, so even if Israel had accepted their King, salvation had to be provided first, then the Kingdom could follow in the proper prophetic order. If the Church had been revealed

in prophesy in the Old Testament, that would have made the offer of the Kingdom to Israel at the time of Christ an empty promise since only one or the other could be fulfilled at that time. But once Christ was rejected as King the Millennial Kingdom was significantly delayed but not canceled since it is revealed in prophesy. And the Church Age, which had been the ultimate Biblical mystery of all time, was revealed in the New Testament, and the new covenant to the Church was launched as an Age of expanded grace. The Apostle Paul discussed the mystery in several passages, including:

"We declare God's wisdom, a *mystery* that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." (1 Corinthians 2:7)

"God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— the *mystery* that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people." (Colossians 1:25-26)

"In keeping with the revelation of the *mystery* hidden for long ages past." (Romans 16:25)

"This *mystery* is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus... 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this *mystery*, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known..." (Ephesians 3:6-10)

"Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the *mystery* hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 16:25-26)

"The *mystery* that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this *mystery*..." (Colossians 1:26-27)

If the Jews of Jesus' day had accepted Jesus as Messiah, the Millennial Kingdom would have commenced soon after the cross. But since the Jews rejected their Messiah, the Millennial Kingdom was delayed and the Church Age inserted instead, delaying the Millennium by thousands of years. The Holy Spirit then put this backup plan into effect and supplied the Church Age principles and doctrines to the Apostles under the new covenant to the Church. This is the part of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ which is most difficult to understand, namely that He was required to offer only what was prophesied, and not what was actually going to be instituted. Again, the offer of the Kingdom to Israel had to be a totally legitimate offer fully capable of being accepted by Israel. We must remember that even though God knows the future, He must act in ways that are consistent with His own perfect character, so an offer from the Messiah had to be legitimate, not a sham offer.

Which brings up the interesting point, namely, because the offer of the Kingdom (Millennium) was legitimate to the Jews of AD 30-33, what would have happened if those Jews had accepted the offer, as they could have done? Since the Church was a backup plan never mentioned in prophecy, and therefore would not have occurred, what would have happened next? As we have noted, Jesus only taught salvation (as the Messiah), the Kingdom (as the King), and the Tribulation (since it was an Old Testament prophesy) during His earthly ministry. These three issues were all prophesied in the Old Testament, and therefore had to be fulfilled exactly as presented in Scripture. So these all would have occurred, however the Church Age would have been left out if the Jews had accepted Jesus' offer of the Kingdom with Him as their King. The time line would therefore have been as follows: The cross would have occurred on the same date, as would have the resurrection after three days and the ascension after 40 days. Jesus had to pay for the sins of mankind no matter what else happened, so the cross would have occurred either way. But this is where the time line would have changed. Instead of the Church Age beginning when it did after the Ascension of Christ, the seven year Tribulation would have started immediately after the Ascension since it was prophesied in the Old Testament and also had been reconfirmed by Jesus as stated in Matthew 24. Jesus had said the Temple and much of Jerusalem would be destroyed, but instead of occurring in AD 70 during the Church Age it would have occurred during the seven years of the Tribulation which would have followed after the cross during AD 33 - 40. At the end of the seven year Tribulation the Second Advent of Christ would have occurred in AD 40. This would have been followed by the start of the promised Kingdom (Millennium) in AD 40 with Christ ruling for 1000 years. At the end of the Millennium in AD 1040 Satan would have been thrown

into the Lake of Fire along with all unbelievers from human history, and human history would have ended in AD 1040. At that point the Eternal State would have begun, with a new heavens, new earth, and New Jerusalem as prophesied in the Old Testament. In case you wonder where you would fit into all of this, God would have put all the souls which became part of the Church Age into the Millennium instead, so you would have lived a very long life under perfect environment. Something to think about. Now back to the earthly ministry of Jesus.

But why all the parables, analogies and indirect answers to questions, and why were these used so extensively when a clearer statement of the principles could have been made without them? Jesus used 41 different parables and analogies, depending on how they are defined. Even His disciples were confused by them, so why didn't Jesus make Himself more clear? One issue is that Jesus had to avoid being killed by the Jewish leadership until the timing was right for the cross, and this is the primary reason Jesus often taught in parables and analogies, and also provided indirect answers to questions, to avoid clearly stating certain issues which would have led to His immediate stoning by the Jewish leadership. It was of utmost importance that Jesus go to the cross to pay for the sins of mankind, more important than any other issue. If Jesus had explicitly and repeatedly stated His deity to the Pharisees they would have executed Him quickly and by stoning, and both needed to be avoided. He had to go to the cross which needed to be delayed for over three years until the timing was right, and He also needed time to legitimately offer the Kingdom and also fulfill many Old Testament prophecies during those several years. For instance, Jesus taught many times that He was a member of the Trinity of God, both in parables and during conversations, but never said directly "I am God." Instead He would say something like "I and my Father are One" and so on to confound those who sought to arrest and execute Him. Matthew 26:63 says: "The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." 64 "You have said so," Jesus replied." These indirect answers were used over and over by Jesus until the time was right for the cross to occur. Therefore the parables and analogies did not reveal a direct connection to Him as Messiah but still taught the principles Jesus intended to convey, primarily about His offer of the Millennial Kingdom. The parables were also memorable, and since most people could not read or write during that time, story forms of teachings were often used. And it made the principles easier to relate to one's own life when an analogy was used. But His teachings were not allegories or metaphors, which implies fiction or exaggeration. They were analogies, which are true and compared the teachings to events and

circumstances the person could understand and relate to. And since the parables were often about the Kingdom Jesus was offering, many start out "The Kingdom is like..." and then present some aspect of what the future Millennium will be like, or why the Kingdom would not be accepted by the Jews of His day due to their blindness of soul.

Also, when Jesus performed miracles for certain people apart from teaching to crowds He told them to "tell no one" about the miracles He had accomplished. (Matthew 9:30, Luke 5:14, Luke 8:56) There were several reasons for this. First, Jesus did not want the miracles to be the focus of His ministry, since His salvation work was the true focus. Secondly, Jesus did not want to attract the attention of the Pharisees to the miracles, since they sought to distort their meaning and convict Him based on performing them. And finally, Jesus wanted the Father and Holy Spirit to reveal who He was. The miracles were necessary to fulfill Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, and to show He was not just a common man, but the miracles were not meant to set aside faith as the means of salvation. As Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven." It is obvious from this exchange that Jesus was not even directly telling His own disciples the details about Himself, but rather relied on the Father and Holy Spirit to bring all people to an understanding of Him, both for salvation and afterward, even the disciples. It was only during the evening before Jesus was arrested and crucified that He lifted His use of figurative speaking and using analogies instead of giving direct answers. John 16:25 says:

"Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf.²⁷ No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.²⁸ I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."²⁹ Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech.³⁰ Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God."

As Jesus was about to be arrested He no longer needed to prevent the Pharisees from having Him executed. The time had come for His salvation work, so He stopped speaking in figurative terms and provided direct answers to enable the Pharisees to have Him arrested and crucified.

The Sermon on the Mount and other teachings by Jesus are often misunderstood because the present day reader tries to relate them to the Church Age, but they were taught during the Age of Israel and applied directly to the Kingdom Jesus was offering. People become confused when they try to apply all the teachings from the Sermon on the Mount to the Church, because they were teachings about what could have been if the Kingdom were accepted, but since it was not, Church Age principles apply to us today instead of Kingdom principles. This is a key point in understanding the teachings of Jesus, that He taught what might have applied if the Kingdom were accepted, not what actually applied to the Church since He never taught Church Age principles, which are often different. Jesus taught the Kingdom in everything He preached to the masses and to the disciples. This is why the Beatitudes are confusing to many Christians, because they were Old Testament and Millennial concepts, and not actually meant for the Church Age. That does not mean some of the concepts cannot apply, but often not in the exact way they were delivered. This is also why the Lord's Prayer said "Thy Kingdom come" because it was a prayer for the Jews to accept the Kingdom during the lifetime of Jesus Christ; and as such it is no longer an appropriate prayer for the Church since it was meant to apply to Old Testament Jews at the time of Christ. When it comes to the Church, our doctrines and spiritual direction are in the Epistles of the New Testament. The four Gospels, where they repeat the teachings of Jesus, must be deciphered to understand where and when they might apply to the Church, and often they do not. Many things Jesus taught apply only to the Kingdom (Millennium) and therefore are not directive to the Church, even though they may be illustrative to the Church. Then there are more general principles in the Gospels taught by Jesus which apply to all Ages of time. So the Gospels must be deciphered to understand when they were meant to apply. As explained above, Jesus had to teach in a way which allowed Israel to accept the Kingdom without conflicts with prophecies or promising a spiritual capability which would not be available if the Kingdom were accepted. If the Jews had accepted the Kingdom then none of the unique Church Age spiritual blessings would have been given, and the New Testament would not have been written except for the Gospels recounting the life and message of Christ. And since the Church Age needed to be instituted in lieu of the Kingdom, we must understand that Jesus was not allowed to offer the Church Age provisions and its spiritual life at the same time He

was offering the Kingdom and its spiritual life. The Ages are very different, and so are the principles and doctrines under which the believers of those Ages are required to live. The two Ages are in conflict since they are very different Ages of time with different spiritual gifts, blessings, and powers. Jesus had to walk a fine line when He taught, teaching only what could apply if the Millennial Kingdom had been accepted, and He never taught what would apply if the Church Age was instituted instead of the Kingdom. This is the mystery which the Apostles later revealed, and especially the Epistles of Paul.

In summary, to understand the ministry of Jesus Christ while on earth we must first understand that He could only teach Old Testament and Millennial Kingdom principles, and He was not able to teach Church Age doctrines and principles. Jesus made a legitimate offer of the Millennial Kingdom to Israel, and He did so in a way which could have been accepted without causing a conflict among prophecies. His entire earthly ministry was entirely consistent with both the offer of the Kingdom and the possibility of the Church Age being instituted instead. Once Israel rejected their Messiah King during the week leading up to the cross, God put in place the backup plan for the Church Age to begin after the cross. Then the Holy Spirit gave the Church Age teachings to the Apostles which were written into the New Testament. The Kingdom has now been delayed until the future Millennium when Christ will reign for 1000 years under perfect environment as the final Age on earth (more about this in a later chapter). The Kingdom will now be instituted at His Second Advent. It is during the Millennium when many of the principles and doctrines Jesus taught while on earth will be fulfilled, not during the Church Age. It is therefore necessary to separate what is meant for the Church from what is meant for the future Millennial Kingdom when Jesus Christ will rule as the King of Kings and many of the principles He taught while on earth will finally be fulfilled during an era of perfect environment under a perfect Ruler.

The Church Age: Expanded Grace as the Christian Way of Life

We currently live in the Church Age, the time from just after the cross until the Rapture (resurrection) of the Church which will take all believers off the earth, then the seven year Tribulation will begin. The Church Age is the period of time when God was first able to fully open up His grace plan to mankind because the cross had just provided reconciliation between God and mankind through the salvation work of Jesus Christ. Before that time God dealt with mankind provisionally “expecting” that reconciliation would eventually be provided by the Messiah, looking forward to the cross when the sin issue would be removed. But until reconciliation actually removed the sin problem God needed to keep in place restrictions and deal with believers under the status of a provisional grace plan until the reality occurred. Romans 3:25 says: “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...” God does not get ahead of His own plan, and His perfect righteousness and justice demanded satisfaction for the sins of mankind. Therefore God needed to wait until that satisfaction for sin was actually provided by the salvation work of Jesus Christ before He could put in place a fully functional and expanded grace plan, which was ultimately provided to the Church. God had planned to provide this expanded grace to the Millennial Kingdom with Jesus Christ as the King, and this was set to begin shortly after the cross and resurrection of Christ, but that was rejected by the Jews so the Kingdom was delayed and the expanded grace went to the Church instead.

Old Testament believers lived a restricted spiritual life since God had to “assume” the sins of mankind would be paid for by the Messiah-Savior in the future. Although God acted in ways consistent with an expected future reality, He did not open wide the floodgates of grace until the reality actually occurred. After the cross God was able to deal with believers under the reality of reconciliation having been accomplished, with the sin issue having been actually removed as an impediment to His interactions with mankind. At that point the New Testament was given to the Church as the new covenant under which God fully opened His grace plan for believers. Thus the plan of God first dealt with mankind provisionally during Old Testament times, then after the cross God interacts with mankind under the provisions of the New Testament with the reality of salvation having been fully accomplished. God held back many grace provisions from believers until after the cross, then He released a flood of grace

toward believers once He was able to do so. At that point the Mosaic Law was shut down as the spiritual life for believers, and the New Testament revealed a whole new facet of God's expanded grace provisions. The "thou shalt not" approach was replaced by the "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" approach of 2 Peter 3:18. Grace replaced simply following instructions, and a far more complex spiritual life replaced the simple obedience required during Old Testament times. The Church Age believer has been freed from the shackles of the Mosaic Law because Christ fulfilled the Law and replaced it with the law of grace. Galatians 5:1 says: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery....⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."

This shows why the Church Age is the first time in human history when God has been able to provide maximum blessings under grace rather than limited blessings under a code of strict obedience, which was the Mosaic Law. Now during the Church Age all believers are given greater powers, greater provisions, and greater grace. The best of everything God has ever offered has been provided to believers of the Church Age, and there never has been, and never will be again, another Age of time which can match it. The Ages which come after the Church are first the Tribulation, which completes the Age of Israel, then the Millennium is once again focused on Israel when Jesus Christ will rule the world from Jerusalem. But these coming Ages will not have the extensive spiritual benefits Church Age believers have. Once the Millennium is over, human history will be complete. And the Church will have special status for all eternity.

One of the issues which helps illustrate how God acted provisionally toward believers before the cross was the location of Old Testament believers after they died. After death all Old Testament believers went to Paradise, a place of comfort and rest in the heart of the earth. None of them went to heaven, nor were they allowed to visit heaven. As an aside, although Hell (Hades, Torments) is also in the heart of the earth, there is a big difference in status, as is well understood. God treated Old Testament believers under a provisional status, allowing them to rest in Paradise after death, but did not allow them into heaven until the cross became a reality. Once the cross occurred, Jesus went immediately from the cross to Paradise and told the believers there that salvation was now a reality, and that they would be moving to heaven very soon, which happened after the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Jesus was the first human ever allowed into heaven. Now when Church Age believers die, we go straight to heaven. Paradise is now empty. Another illustration of the provisional status of Old Testament believers was the Mosaic Law which was a minimalist approach with limited grace provisions, and an emphasis on strict obedience as the basis of the spiritual life. Those believers had few spiritual resources and minimal spiritual power. After the cross, Church Age believers were freed from these limitations and given expanded grace as the spiritual way of life.

A primary aspect of expanded grace is the Holy Spirit ministry to the Church, and the Holy Spirit has been given to all believers of the Church Age without measure. In previous periods of time the Holy Spirit did not empower most believers, but rather the Holy Spirit was only given for special empowerment of a few leaders at certain times such as Moses, David, Samson, and the prophets. But even for those few the Holy Spirit was said to be "with them" for specific empowerment, not "in them" for continuous indwelling and broad based empowerment, as is the case for all Church Age believers. During the Church Age the Holy Spirit is in all believers and available to empower every believer. John 7:39 says "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified", meaning the Holy Spirit could not indwell any believer until Jesus Christ had accomplished the mission of providing salvation. During the Last Supper Jesus was giving instructions to His disciples about the changes which were coming, including the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit during the Church Age. John 14:16 says: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." The "will be in you" was what began on the day of Pentecost when the Church Age began fifty days after the resurrection of Christ. The disciples were still living at that point in the Age of Israel when believers did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to empower their spiritual lives. The spiritual life of Old Testament believers, including the disciples, was much more basic and lacking in impact compared to Church Age believers. As previously mentioned, their spiritual life was one of strict obedience and a simple form of faith. But after the Church Age began the power supplied by the Holy Spirit has lifted Church Age believers to the heights of spiritual impact never dreamed of by even the greats of the Old Testament, including Abraham, Moses, David and all the prophets. The Church Age is unique in the annals of spiritual history because of what the Holy Spirit is able to do for every Church Age believer. Unfortunately, the current status of Churches ignores the power of the Holy Spirit and instead promotes

a "praise and worship" approach without the underlying support of extensive knowledge of the Word of God, which is required before there can be any real praise or worship. The Old Testament also focused on the spiritual heroes, while the Church Age brings every believer to a level where they can exceed all of them, if only they will "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" and subsequently glorify our Lord in ways never before possible.

We have previously discussed how until the time of the cross the Church Age was a "mystery" and was therefore not revealed or even mentioned in the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ also did not discuss it. This was because the Millennial Kingdom which Christ was offering during His earthly ministry needed to be a legitimate offer which could be accepted by Israel at that time. The Church Age, which had been the ultimate Biblical mystery of all time, was revealed in the New Testament. This new covenant to the Church launched the Age of expanded grace which was never revealed to Old Testament believers. It was kept hidden and reserved for Church Age believers until the cross occurred, and then the best spiritual provisions of all time could finally be offered to man by God.

The Church will be the first group of believers to be resurrected, showing the importance of the Church in the hierarchy of Ages. This will occur at the Rapture (resurrection) of the Church, just prior to the Tribulation. Church Age believers will also rule with Christ during the Millennium and then again during the Eternal State. And no greater earthly blessings have been provided to any group of believers than those given to Church Age believers. We have unique blessings which have never been offered to any believer of any prior Age since the provisional status of salvation only became a reality after the cross. We are the Bride of Christ, and will be closer to Him than any other group of believers ever were or will be. (Ephesians 5:22-33) We have the maximum power of the Holy Spirit unlike any other group of believers. We have greater access to God through prayer and more blessings than at any time, before or after. We are allowed to function under a grace system which minimizes the impact of sin in our lives, and maximizes the impact of growing in grace. We have been set free -- free to serve our Lord, but of course not free to do as we please. For all eternity the Church will be the pre-eminent group of believers because of what they accomplished on earth to show the full measure of God's grace given to the maximum extent possible to His believers.

If the Church has been set free from the Law, what is our goal? Why do we remain on the earth after salvation? The Apostle Paul told the Roman Church "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." and the Ephesian Church "be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self [human spirit full of the Word], created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Note the emphasis on learning God's Word which renews the soul and fills the human spirit with Bible truths. However most believers erroneously think the Christian life is merely living a moral life, being better than the average person, and this alone is somehow pleasing to God. Avoidance of sin becomes their highest priority, mixed in with being a generally nice person toward others. This view of the Christian way of life is human powered self-improvement and therefore misguided when separated from spiritual growth. There exists a battle in the soul for every person to keep the sinful nature under control to some degree, and although we as believers can never fully succeed, we can gain advantages by filling up our human spirit with the Word of God. While the Old Testament placed an emphasis on strict obedience and simple faith as the spiritual life, the Church has been freed from the shackles of the Mosaic Law. The spiritual life for the Church is far more advanced, placing the emphasis instead on learning the Word of God, which leads to spiritual growth and increased power through the Holy Spirit. As we "grow in grace" we use our spiritual knowledge under the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily life, applying that spiritual knowledge to live a higher order spiritual life with enhanced purpose and power. Believers will continue to sin since we all have a sinful nature and do not lose it at salvation. But if we continually confess our sins and learn God's Word we can move ahead in our spiritual life under God's power and grow out of many of those sins as we gain spiritual strength and momentum. It is God's provisions and power, not human power, which must be used to empower our spiritual life, which in turn controls the sinful nature to a significant degree and also enables using the advanced spiritual provisions given to the Church. Minimizing sin in our life is a result, not a means, of spirituality; and using God's power is the only power which both pleases God and has lasting spiritual impact. God only expects back from us what He first gives to us in grace.

God does not promote sin, of course, but He has taken it out of the way as a barrier to having a relationship with Him. Our spiritual way of life is, simply stated, to use the freedom Christ has given us to make continual positive decisions toward God. After the first positive decision toward Christ as

Savior has been made, we are a child of God forever. We are saved eternally. There is no losing that status. But God requires a continuation of positive decisions and actions toward Him once we are in the family. We begin as spiritual babies, having just been "born again" as John 3:3 discusses, since we just received a human spirit at salvation. As with any baby, spiritual food is required, and that is the Word of God. So the next series of positive decisions are twofold, continual requests for forgiveness of sins as they occur (and they will continue throughout the life of every believer) which maintains the power of the Holy Spirit in the life, and also positive decisions toward the Word of God, by learning it and applying it to our life. These result in spiritual growth and living the Christian way of life which is pleasing to God. The more we learn and grow and apply the Word, the greater God is pleased with us. And this results in blessing during our time on earth, and also eternal rewards. So the positive daily decisions to request forgiveness of sins as necessary keeps the power of the Holy Spirit functioning in our spiritual lives. Along with that, positive daily decisions are required to learn from the Word of God under the power of the Holy Spirit to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18) And as we grow, positive daily decisions are made to apply what we have learned and to "think Biblically" using the Word of God, which is the Mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Thinking drives actions, and thinking Biblically drives actions which please God and glorify our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church Age believer has been set free from the Law to serve our Lord by first growing in knowledge of the Word of God, which strengthens our faith and provides ever expanding opportunities for higher levels of spiritual impact. As we grow in the Word we gain strength of faith and have increased ability to serve the Lord in more significant ways. Those ways are different for each believer, according to the various gifts given to each one. Some are pastors, some evangelists, some providing help to others, some focused on prayer, some serving as administrators, some never knowing what their individual gift is and simply doing what is required at the right times and places. Our mission after salvation is to learn, grow, and serve God by making continual positive decisions toward Him and His plan for our life. And God supplies the power through the Holy Spirit, which means it is not a struggle, but rather we are carried along by the grace of God if we will only continue making positive decisions toward Him. This is where divine guidance comes into play as the believer grows in the Word, since most guidance from God becomes simply applying what has been learned, and doing so under the power of the Holy Spirit who will occasionally nudge us along and into certain decisions which become obvious and even unavoidable. Therefore most of the Christian life is about learning and applying the Word. Of course, there will be bumps and diversions and failures along the

way, most self induced. But God is always ready for the next positive decision toward Him, and off we go again in His plan of grace.

We have seen that sin is not the issue in salvation since Jesus Christ was judged on the cross for every sin ever committed, because no human could ever pay for their own sins no matter how many or how few. Therefore the relative amount of sins, or sin types, has no bearing on salvation. Salvation is only by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, and any sinner can have salvation if they accept it by faith in Christ. No person will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire for being sinful. We are all sinful. It is our nature to sin ever since Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, and we can only be relatively more or less sinful, not sinless. God does not deal in relative righteousness. So also after salvation, merely trying to practice avoidance of sin is not the Christian way of life, although as noted previously God does not promote sin. The Christian way of life is a series of positives toward God, and is therefore not based primarily on negatives such as avoidance of sins, or avoidance of certain sins. However the series of positives discussed above will lead to a reduction in the negatives over time as we grow spiritually, resulting in the believer generally sinning less often. As the Apostle Paul said, "Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1) The issue in the Christian way of life becomes what power we use. If we attempt to use our own power we will fail, even though we might reduce sinning, we end up in arrogant self righteousness about our human successes. But if we use the power supplied by God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and make those daily positive decisions toward God and His plan under that power, we will be living the spiritual life God intends for us. As with a newborn we must grow up, and the early stages are not stellar successes, but it is a step by step process. The key is daily positive decisions under the power of the Holy Spirit, not negative decisions under our own power to avoid this or that.

Unfortunately, many believers do not follow God's prescription for the spiritual way of life, but rather live a life of self-righteousness, comparing their relative sins, both by type and by quantity, to the sins of others. That relative sinlessness has nothing to do with either salvation or with the Christian way of life, and a self righteousness based on relative righteousness is despised by God. Self righteousness is not the Christian way of life any more than immorality is. Most believers think that the self righteous

approach to life is preferred by God over immorality, but that is not the case. God despises both. But what exactly is self righteousness?

The Bible defines self righteousness as a viewpoint of superiority based on morality. It is a mixture of both arrogance and judging of others which compares one's own sins with those of other people, and creates a sliding scale of moral superiority over others based on that relative sense of whose sins are considered worse by type and quantity. Although the Bible teaches that morality is good, it does not teach that superiority based on morality is authorized by God, which it is not. Because self righteousness is arrogance and often results in judging others, God considers arrogance and judging to be among the worst of sins, outranking many carnal sins most believers would assume to be worse. It would shock these moralizers that God's sense of the worst sins does not match their own, and that their own sins are viewed as worse than the carnal people they look down upon. Proverbs 6:16 provides the list of the worst sins, not the Ten Commandments which is a moral code for the administration of the Jewish nation under a theocracy: "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community." Nowhere on the list is adultery, drunkenness, or any number of carnal sins ranked highest by most self righteous Christians. The self righteous Christian regularly commits several of these worst sins, including arrogance, lying about others, and stirring up trouble in the community. Yet they consider themselves highly moral and close to God based on avoiding other sins they view as worse. God does not share that viewpoint.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were very moral yet entirely self righteous. Jesus repeatedly chastised them for such, calling them names such as "hypocrites", "whitewashed tombstones" and a "brood of vipers." Self righteousness is a sin of arrogance combined with other mental sins, so it is a sin complex, one which the Lord spoke strongly against while on earth. The highly moral Pharisees used their self-righteousness to oppose Jesus' ministry at every turn. And it was the self-righteousness of the Pharisees which crucified Jesus, not immorality. During the earthly ministry of Jesus the number one attack on Him was from self righteous people who thought they were better than He was. Odd as that might seem, this pattern repeats throughout the entirety of the human existence.

In contrast to self righteousness, God's plan and the Christian spiritual life is one of grace whereby God does the work and mankind can accept the results and benefit, or can reject God's work and gracious gifts and face the consequences of using their own works instead. Under grace God gets the glory and mankind gets the benefit. God has solved the sin problem on the cross. They were paid in full by Jesus Christ, so sin is not the main issue in pleasing God. We all sin. Most believers simply do not know enough about the definition of sin to know they sin far more often than they think. But God has provided a means to deal with our personal sins by requesting forgiveness and moving on, forgetting what is behind and growing up spiritually. However, the believer who rejects God's grace as the focus of their daily spiritual life ends up being disciplined by God. Hebrews 12: 7 says: "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all." Discipline from God is meant to put us back on the right track spiritually. We cannot lose salvation, but the discipline can be intense.

Guilt over past sins is especially destructive to the Christian way of life. In fact, guilt is a sin which is worse than most sins believers have guilt over. And personal penance is an insult to God's grace. God has provided us with the grace approach to confession of sin to Him and then moving on as if it never happened. God forgives sins which have been confessed, and all unknown sins along with the confessed ones. Guilt is a failure to accept God's grace which enables spiritual advancement. Guilt is living in a past which God has forgiven and "forgotten." Guilt is one of the most debilitating sins of all and has destroyed the spiritual life of many believers. And teaching children to feel guilty about numerous things in life sets them up for spiritual failure as an adult. Yet in all of this, guilt is the primary motivator of believers in numerous church denominations, dooming those believers to spiritual failure as well as a miserable life.

From what we have noted so far about the Christian way of life a sad reality becomes clear about the current state of churches. They do not teach grace, namely that God provides to us in grace all He ever demands back from us. They are unclear about how salvation is by a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The reality is that most churches teach their congregation of believers to simply be good people and avoid sinning in order to have salvation and find favor with God. In other words, they teach human-powered self improvement which is a rejection of God's grace and power. The result is a life of

self righteousness based on character building, avoiding certain specific sins and human powered self-improvement through mental gymnastics as a substitute for God's grace. They teach that being good people means God will approve of them, which is false. They also teach that God will bless them for giving lots of money, which is also not true. As will be discussed in a later chapter, tithing is not part of the Church Age, but was only for Old Testament Israel. Grace gives people salvation by faith as a finished gift, then grace teaches the believer to grow up spiritually through the Word of God under the power of the Holy Spirit which leads to grace-powered changes in the life. Will a person try to please God by his own works or rely on the finished work of Christ for him? Will a person attempt to better himself or be transformed by the power of God into the image of Christ? Will a person merely try to change the outputs of his sinful nature to something less humanly objectionable or accept the divine nature by growth in grace through the power supplied by God? Unbelievers can be good people and they are not saved and cannot find favor with God on their own. Therefore the things being taught in most churches are not the means of accepting or living the Christian life, but rather trying to achieve human viewpoint self improvements without accepting the power God supplies in grace, the only power God accepts. Therefore the current state of the Church is largely one of using self-righteousness, sin reduction, and following Old Testament directives as a means to please God. These substitutes for the real Christian way of life involves using relative value judgments which compare sins as a means of gaining spiritual stature by comparison to others, and assigning relative values to various sins. This leads to judging others who do not meet those artificial standards while ignoring God's plan which emphasizes growth in the Word resulting in faith, grace, tolerance and love all of which are based on humility. Some churches even place undue emphasis on social responsibility and even activism, which is merely a means of cleaning up Satan's world, making Satan appear more appealing to unbelievers. That is reverse evangelism aimed at making Satan look good, and is certainly not part of God's plan, and not honoring to God. And none of this self powered self improvement pleases God in any way, shape or form. Quite simply it is not the Christian way of life.

Although unbelievers have no salvation, they can still generally conform with God's divine laws set up for all humans, including such things as respect for parents, family values, monogamous marriage, hard work, playing fair, helping neighbors, and so on. An unbeliever can be outwardly very moral in actions, and not much different in morality than many believers due to God's divine laws which encourage general decency among all people. This is a matter of promoting a stable society where all

are free to choose for or against God, but has nothing to do with salvation, and it is not the spiritual life for Church Age believers. Therefore these divine laws emphasizing morality and stability are meant for the entire human race, unbelievers as well as believers. And remember in all of this, morality has nothing to do with salvation, but rather morality is for both unbelievers and believers as a part of the issue of providing for a stable society under which God's Plan can play operate.

As we have seen, the Christian way of life is not a series of negatives, but rather it is based on a series of positives toward God. Those positives start with a positive acceptance of grace salvation through Jesus Christ. It continues by making consistent positive decisions to request forgiveness of sins on a regular basis to maintain the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It also includes increased positive decisions toward God by learning the Word of God on a regular, hopefully daily, basis. Nothing about God's plan involves using our own relative power, which in reality is weakness. The spiritual life is not about less, but rather about more of everything related to God in positive ways. God requires that we constantly say "yes" to Him by continually taking what He hands to us.

God is only pleased when someone gives back to Him what He has first given to that person in grace. God provides in grace all He ever demands back from us. And He only accepts back from us anything that He first gave to us. The positive acceptance of grace gifts and use of the power from God and positively giving back to Him using what He has previously given to us is the Christian way of life. God gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to use, and He is only pleased by that power. Human power has no standing with God.

God has given greatly expanded grace provisions and power to Church Age believers since the cross enabled God to provide those greater blessings due to reality and finality of salvation. Therefore believers in the Church Age are under expanded grace instead of being under the Mosaic Law which was a code of prohibition-based directives. The Church is an Age of human history when all believers have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are their own priest, are on the royal staff of the Lord Himself, and have a completed Bible with the New Testament providing an emphasis on grace rather than an emphasis on strict obedience to rules and codes, as with the Mosaic Law. The New Testament has become our spiritual food and the Holy Spirit uses it to empower our lives for service to God, and this combination enables us to worship God more intensely through Jesus Christ. Very few Old Testament

believers had the power of the Holy Spirit, which was reserved for the prophets and a few others. But every Church Age believer has the power of the Holy Spirit available to them, even though most do not use that power. And the New Testament provides a complex set of doctrines and instructions providing freedom to worship and serve, rather than restricting believers to obedience under extensive rules and "thou shalt nots" as in Old Testament times. There is no more blessed group of believers than the Church, past or future. We have the best of everything God has ever provided because Jesus Christ fulfilled and set aside the Mosaic Law, providing salvation and also a grace-based approach for Church Age believers. Sin has been defeated, and our personal sins do not keep us down as long as we confess them and move on. Because salvation is now a reality after the cross, God was able to provide a greatly expanded grace-based way of life for the Church. Therefore expanded grace from God and a resultant expanded grace toward others are the overarching standards for the Church Age believer.

Old Testament Relevance to the Church Age

Now that we have explored the expanded grace of the Church Age, it is useful to look back at the Old Testament to see how it applies today. Many Christians struggle to understand the relevance of the Old Testament to their spiritual lives. The Bible has an Old Testament and a New Testament, and most default to using the New Testament but do not understand why, or what parts of the Old Testament still apply. Some try to live the Old Testament life, thinking that is important. So what is the current relevance of the Old Testament in our spiritual life, and why are there two Testaments in the Bible anyway?

The correct terms for the two parts of the Bible are Old Covenant and New Covenant regardless of what has been printed on Bibles for many years. A Bible covenant is a contract between God and man whereby God agrees to do and provide certain things, and requirements are placed on man as the recipients of God's favor. God changes His covenants with mankind during various Ages of time in order to prove certain different issues as will be discussed further. Since the word "testament" is what people expect we will generally use that term since it would be confusing to do otherwise.

As an overview, when dealing with the issue of current relevance of the Old Testament it is important to separate the information into three categories: 1) that which was directive only to Israel and no longer valid for the Church, 2) that which is informative and remains useful in several categories, and 3) prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled. The directive portions meant only for Israel during Old Testament times are no longer valid for our spiritual direction, specifically the Mosaic Law. The informative portions generally remain valid, and are useful in several categories including historical information, lessons to be learned from the successes and failures of major figures, the Books of Wisdom, and certain other general information. Finally all unfulfilled prophecies remain valid until they are fulfilled. That is the overview, now the details will follow.

Christ is the key to understanding the Old Testament. It was generally written about Him as the future Messiah in order to reveal Him to mankind before the cross occurred. Jesus said "In the volume of the Book it is written of Me" (Heb.10:7) and "Search the Scriptures..they are they which testify of Me."

(John 5:39). As part of the revelation of the coming Messiah, Israel was set up as God's chosen people to deliver that message to the world. The Old Testament Mosaic Law was therefore given to Israel to establish how it would function as a spiritual nation to use until the Messiah would redeem mankind from the curse of sin. That was its purpose, and when that purpose was complete a new covenant would and did replace it after the cross. The Mosaic Law is the early part of the Old Testament which provided laws, moral codes, social directives and ceremonial requirements for Israel to live by, essentially the latter part of Genesis and most of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These were a temporary covenant with Israel and meant only for them as God's chosen people who were the keepers of divine truth and also required to evangelize the world. This is what it means that the Jews were God's chosen people, since they were chosen to be the keepers of the scriptures and the evangelizers of the world, both during Old Testament times and again in the future after the Church Age. But currently all Jews who are believers are simply part of the Church.

The theme of the Old Testament was that mankind was in slavery to sin, and God would provide a Messiah to deliver mankind from the curse of sin. Once the Messiah Jesus Christ completed the salvation work on the cross this old covenant became outdated and no longer in effect, so it was set aside in favor of a new covenant to the Church, commonly known as the New Testament, which replaced the requirements of the Mosaic Law portion of the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul said "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." (Romans 10:4) Although the Mosaic Law portion of the Old Testament has been set aside as directive for our spiritual life, other portions which were not part of the Mosaic Law generally remain valid, although the New Testament provides the primary spiritual life directives for the Church. Overall, the key to understanding the current validity of the Old Testament is to understand that the Mosaic Law is no longer spiritually directive for the Church Age believer. That is because Christ fulfilled it, and then He set it aside as being completed.

The Church lives under the New Testament as its directive covenant with God and is prohibited from functioning under the Mosaic Law as direction for the spiritual life of believers. This is because the work of Christ on the cross set aside the Mosaic Law as a directive covenant since "Christ is the culmination of the law..." as mentioned above. But it is all too common for Christians to accept a grace salvation by faith in Christ apart from the works of the Mosaic Law but then revert to the onerous

directives of the Law as the rules governing their spiritual life. The Apostle Paul addressed this to the Galatians when he wrote "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1) Any church or religious group which seeks to function under the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament as spiritually directive is violating God's will and purpose, as Paul clearly states. The Old Testament now has a subordinate role, with prophecies remaining to be fulfilled, and the non-law portions can definitely be illustrative to us. But with regard to the Mosaic Law the cross changed how God was able to deal with man once the problem of sin had been removed as a barrier between God and man, and in turn God changed how we must live our spiritual lives now that Christ has set us free from the provisions of the Mosaic Law. God waited until after the cross to provide the New Testament, which is the new covenant with the Church. The cross was the single most important point in human history, and divided how God was able to deal with man before and after. After the cross God was able to greatly expand the grace provisions we live under and free us from onerous requirements of rituals, sacrifices, spiritual feasts, codes and prohibitions against mundane activities.

A discussion about how God divides human history into periods of time, referred to as Ages in the Bible, helps us understand why the Old Testament has been set aside. Although not part of this study due to its complexities, a brief explanation of Ages is necessary to see how we fit into God's overall plan since each Age has unique features. God does not constantly change His mind and therefore change how He deals with man, but rather He has a multi-faceted plan for human history which must play out in stages. Those stages each have different requirements and rules (covenants) necessitating changes in God's direction to man during the various Ages of time. God has divided human history into Ages which are:

- 1) Age of the Patriarchs: from Adam until Moses (i.e., Israel established as a nation)
- 2) Age of Israel Part I: from Moses to the Cross, then an interruption inserts the Church Age
- 3) Age of the Church: from the Cross until the Rapture (Resurrection of the Church)
- 4) Age of Israel Part II: resumes and finishes Age of Israel during the seven year Tribulation
- 5) Millennium: the 1000 year reign of Christ completes human history.

We see there are four Ages, however they cover five separate periods of time since the Age of Israel is split into two separate parts, with the Church Age inserted between those two parts. The Tribulation will resume and finish the Age of Israel since it was interrupted seven years short of completion when the Church Age was instituted shortly after the cross on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3). It is important to understand that the Tribulation is part of the Age of Israel since this explains many things about events which will occur during that period of time. This will be discussed in a later chapter, and for additional details my book "The Future Times: Biblical Prophecies About the Remainder of Time & Beyond" is available free online.

Going back to the first Age when Adam and the woman sinned in the Garden of Eden, God needed to either condemn them immediately to the Lake of Fire or provide a plan for salvation. God chose to provide salvation through a future Messiah who would eventually be Jesus Christ. This Messiah Savior would not be provided immediately after the first sin, therefore God divided how He would interact with mankind into stages with the Messiah's salvation work being the central issue in human history. God established a plan which included the various Ages discussed above, and they would require different covenants as time progressed to define how God and man would interact during each Age. God first made some simple covenants with Adam and the Patriarchs until the time came for God to set aside a nation called Israel as His people chosen to serve Him by being the keeper of the scriptures and the evangelizers of the world. At the proper time in human history, the Age of Israel began and covenants were made with Israel, which eventually became the Old Testament. Then the most important dividing issue in the plan of God occurred, which was the cross when the Messiah paid for the sins of all mankind, past and future, and satisfied the demands of God's perfect character by making full payment for sin. As previously discussed, God needed to deal with man in certain different ways until the salvation work was actually completed on the cross, then after the cross He was able to offer increased grace and access to Himself once the sin issue was finally removed. This is the defining issue with regard to why there was an Old Testament which dealt with mankind in a provisional way and then a New Testament which deals with mankind under the reality of completion of reconciliation between God and man. Therefore God provided the Old Testament to be used until the cross, then the Law portion of it was set aside as no longer directive to believers after its usefulness was complete, and a new covenant was given to the Church.

The New Testament defines which parts of the Old Testament remain directive, which parts have been shut down, and which parts are now used for reference, information, illustrations and as simple doctrines which have universal application to all Ages due to their generality. To be clear, the Old Testament is still useful, even though much of it is no longer directive regarding how Church Age believers must live the spiritual life. But there is a big difference between useful and directive, and that is the main point being made here. A covenant is directive to the Age for which it was intended, but is not directive to other Ages unless re-certified in the new successor covenant.

Another important consideration is that Jesus Christ fulfilled vast portions of the Old Testament, including numerous prophecies, analogous rituals (all animal sacrifices, feasts, etc), "types" of Christ, representative Temple furniture including the Ark of the Covenant, and other portions which represented the future Messiah, whether directly or indirectly. This means those portions of the Old Testament are completed and therefore no longer valid, except historically, since there cannot be another Messiah. Vast portions of the Mosaic Law were representational analogies to Christ the Messiah and His work of salvation, and He fulfilled all the Mosaic Law requirements for righteousness and reconciliation which the Law could never provide, and on the cross paid in full the penalty for sin required by God the Father. The entirety of the animal sacrifices, food offerings, Levitical priesthood rituals, tabernacle and temple furnishings, and so on presented the future Messiah in analogous terms which demonstrated how God required a real sacrifice for the sin issue, and the animals and other offerings were merely representative of the future Messiah. But they never pleased God of themselves, they only taught how God would be pleased by the Messiah. By taking away the sin issue and providing reconciliation between God and man on the basis of faith in Himself, Christ fulfilled and then canceled the Mosaic Law as a directive code. Then the New Testament outlined the new provisions which replaced the temporary provisions of the now retired Mosaic Law. John 1:17 says: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Romans 10:4 "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." Hebrews 7:18 "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God." Ephesians 2:14 "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations." Colossians 1:13 says: "He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which

stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.” Hebrews 9:10 says the Levitical offerings were “external regulations applying until the time of the new order” meaning the new covenant of the Church Age as outlined in the New Testament. We see how the Bible clearly says the Mosaic Law has been fulfilled, has come to an end, and has been set aside. The Mosaic Law was fulfilled by Jesus Christ who kept it perfectly before His death on the cross, then on the cross paid the penalty for sin as required in the Law, so the Mosaic Law is no longer directive to believers after the cross. Going back now to living under the Law of Moses is going back into a system which has been deactivated. It is like saying the work of Christ was not effective. We can learn many things from the Old Testament but must not live under the Mosaic Law as a directive covenant. The Church has been set free from the restrictions of the Law of Moses, and must not re-shackle itself or it will lose out on the expanded grace plan God has in store for believers during the Church Age.

Provided below are additional verses which address the issue of the Mosaic Law vs. the grace plan for the Church Age:

Hebrews 10:1-4 “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

Philippians 3:9 “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

Romans 3:19 “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. ²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Romans 3:28 “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

Romans 8: 1-4: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Romans 5:20 “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Galatians 2:16 “Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

The Apostle Paul was hounded by a group of religious unbelievers called “Judaizers” who sought to undo the teaching of Paul wherever he went, such as in Galatia. Paul taught that the grace of God had been expanded after Christ set us free from the Mosaic Law. But each time Paul left a town, the Judaizers went into those same places such as Galatia and told those believers they must live under the Law and ignore Paul’s teachings. Afterward Paul wrote a blistering epistle to the Galatians to reinforce his grace message, and these are representative passages on the subject of the Mosaic Law:

Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”

Galatians 3:19: “Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”

Galatians 4:9-11: “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? ¹⁰ You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Galatians 4:21-25: “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. ²⁴ These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.

Galatians 5:1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Galatians 5:4 “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”

Galatians 5:18 “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

Paul made it very clear to the Galatians that Christ freed us from the drudgery and curse of the Mosaic Law, and that we must not return to it. The Law was only given to Israel to teach them about the future Messiah, and to show them how no one can be saved on their own since no one can keep the Law perfectly except the Messiah Jesus Christ the God-Man. Now that the cross has occurred, we are free from the Law, and it has been set aside. If a believer after the cross attempts to go back and live under the Mosaic Law they are in fact rejecting the work of Christ on the cross which fulfilled those Old Testament provisions. They reject the reality of the expanded grace plan purchased at great price by the Lord Jesus Christ and instead go back into the shadows and attempt to worship under the limited provisions which God Himself has set aside. They reject the new covenant in exchange for a powerless old covenant. Since the work of Christ was successful at completing the Old Testament requirements,

they are no longer in effect and discarded as the means of serving God. The new covenant as outlined in the New Testament is now the way to please God, since God's plan has moved on to a new and better stage focused on expanded grace.

Another future change in covenants will occur when the Millennium begins under the direct rule of Jesus Christ on earth. When Christ returns He will implement the promised “New Covenant to Israel” and a new set of currently unrevealed principles, doctrines and requirements for worship will be put in place to worship Christ the King as the God-Man Ruler on who is present on the earth. With Christ present on the earth there will be changes made which require eliminating the old new covenant, which is the one we are living under now during the Church Age.

Jeremiah 31:33 “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time [Millennium],” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD.”

When that occurs, the current New Testament will be set aside just as the Old Testament has been set aside during the Church Age. Mankind must keep up with God and live under the rules outlined for the Age in which that person lives. We must not try to live in someone else’s Age by living under their outdated and superseded covenant.

The Mosaic Law was never a means of salvation, but rather showed how man could never save himself since the issue of sin could not be conquered by any sinful person. No one could ever attain the perfect righteousness required to live with God forever on their own. Therefore salvation has always been by faith in the Messiah (Savior). During the Old Testament people believed that God would send a Messiah to reconcile God and mankind, and by this faith in a future Messiah they gained salvation. After the cross people gain salvation by believing in Jesus Christ as the actual Savior. Once the reality of the cross has occurred, those provisions which looked forward to reconciliation between God and mankind were set aside. The shadows have been replaced by the reality, and with that a new set of divine rules apply.

It may come as a shock, but the Church is not even under the Ten Commandments since it is part of the Mosaic Law. They were given to Israel to establish order and discipline in the Jewish society, and dealt with issues facing them as a struggling new nation just released from slavery in Egypt. Certain types of sins would tear them apart as a nation, therefore they were emphasized. Idolatry, adultery, murder, coveting, dishonoring parents were all threats to good order and discipline in a society, especially one where God was the direct ruler under a theocracy. Regarding the ten items listed, the Church does not keep Saturday holy as required by the Ten Commandments, so that throws out one of the ten right away. While complying with the other nine commandments which speak of sin is also a requirement of our new covenant, the approach has changed from a “thou shalt not” (i.e., “don’t do that”) approach to being a grace approach recognizing we are all sinners who need to grow out of sin as our love of the Lord increases. The Ten Commandments were about defining how a nation should maintain freedom under God in a theocracy where God is the direct ruler, as Israel was designed to be, until they demanded a human king in violation of God’s requirements for them. This is another very important reason why the Mosaic Law was only for Israel before the cross, namely the Mosaic Law established Israel as a theocracy under the direct rule of God, not under the rule of man. The Jews rejected this principle to their detriment. However, no nation except Old Testament Israel was supposed to be a theocracy, therefore the detailed directives of the Law were not meant to apply to any nation except for Israel. This is because they were established as a nation set aside by God as His representatives to the world in order to spread the message of salvation and maintain the scriptures. The Ten Commandments only listed a few sins, and not the worst of them in God’s view. God views arrogance as worse than many of the sins listed in the Ten Commandments. Proverbs 6 provides a list of the sins God views as the worst: “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.” The Sabbath days during the Old Testament times required the person to stop doing ordinary things and instead contemplate what they had learned about the Messiah through the Levitical sacrifices and other information. It was a time to refocus away from earthly things and turn the focus toward God. This requirement was put into the Ten Commandments and other Old Testament codes. The Sabbath of the Old Testament was not only every Saturday for the Jews, but also the first day of every month, and also the six annual feast days were Sabbath days. So anyone who thinks keeping

Sunday "holy" complies with the Ten Commandments is far off base, since no requirement was ever declared for the Church regarding Sunday, but rather it is simply a traditional assembly worship day for the Church in celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, which occurred on a Sunday. The Church may gather on Sunday in remembrance of the resurrection, but there is no requirement to avoid work or strenuous efforts or prohibit children from playing and having fun. These prohibitions only had meaning to Israel as a shadow form of worship which no longer applies. To be clear, nine of the Ten Commandments are sins we should avoid, but "keeping the Sabbath holy" does not apply any longer since there is no Sabbath. So saying the Ten Commandments are a requirement is not accurate since the Sabbath observance (Saturday) has been removed. The Ten Commandments was part of the Mosaic Law, and it has been set aside. The avoidance of all sins is our requirement from the New Testament, so there are no longer only nine called out as being special. But even so the New Testament recognizes our weaknesses and emphasizes forgiveness of personal sins by simply requesting forgiveness from God, rather than sacrificing an animal for it.

If anyone thinks Church Age believers must follow the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments, then why are they not complying with the verses which immediately follow the Ten Commandments in Exodus Chapter 20:

Exodus 20:24 "Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. ²⁵ If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it. ²⁶ And do not go up to my altar on steps, or your private parts may be exposed."

Church Age believers are not prohibited from walking up stairs out of concern about their private parts. We do not make alters made of earth. We do not sacrifice animals. We are allowed to use tools. We can use any type of stone we choose. We must not sacrifice animals, or prohibit our family from eating certain foods such as pork, or follow Old Testament rituals. We do not tithe, which was taxation in Israel. We are not prohibited from being in a room with a dead person. We are not required to stay away from dogs. We must not prohibit children from having fun on a Sabbath since there is no Sabbath during the Church Age (Sunday is a day of assembly worship celebrating the Resurrection, not a

Sabbath). We must not try to enforce as a spiritual requirement any of the numerous lifestyle prohibitions listed in the Old Testament. These types of prohibitions have been removed entirely. We have been set free from the rigorous and monotonous and burdensome requirements of a Mosaic Law which were only meant to teach believers about God at a time before the salvation work of the Messiah was accomplished, before most people could read, and before there were books. Christ was the end of the Law. Going back to it ignores the work of our Savior to set us free from sin and from the Mosaic Law which defined sin and set burdensome rules for how to deal with spiritual issues and also mundane daily life issues. Many Old Testament directives spoke figuratively of avoiding things which represented sin or evil. And numerous Old Testament prohibitions concerning food, unclean animals and people such as lepers, working on Saturday, and so forth were teaching aids to the Old Testament believers, and this was how they learned many lessons. Along with those there was a vast array of rituals which were also used to teach principles including salvation, forgiveness of sins, and the characteristics of the future Messiah. We do not live in the shadows of such outdated teaching methods since we have the New Testament. Hebrews 10:1 says: “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.” Only Jesus Christ in person as Savior would be the reality. And after He provided salvation, the covenants with mankind were changed from the old covenant to the new covenant to reflect that reality.

Some issues related to Israel's national life were meant to teach them spiritual lessons which only applied to them, such as sabbatical years (every 7 years), Jubilee years (every 50 years), and the celebration of the seven annual feasts. The first four annual feasts occur during the spring (Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Weeks) and the last three feasts (Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles) occurred during the fall. Jesus Christ fulfilled the first four feasts, but the last three feasts speak of the Tribulation and Millennial reign of Christ so their fulfillment is still future. This shows yet again how there are prophecies yet to be fulfilled from the Old Testament, and these prophecies remain very much valid even though the rituals and feasts do not. And many prophecies were about the Messiah and have already been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Also, some prophecies were about specific nations and empires and disasters which were fulfilled during Old Testament times. But many other prophecies remain to be fulfilled. The remaining unfulfilled prophecies are about the Tribulation and the Millennium, which come after the Church Age ends with the Rapture (resurrection)

of the Church. There are no prophecies which will be fulfilled during the Church Age except for the Rapture itself. The Tribulation and Millennium will be covered in detail in a later chapter. So the most important portions of the Old Testament which remain valid are the numerous prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled. Every last prophecy must be fulfilled before the end of time.

Regarding the non-Law portions of the Old Testament which remain generally valid, there are several categories of useful information. The Old Testament contains historical and practical information which put our lives into perspective related to the timeline of God's plan. God has revealed how man was created, how man fell, the Great Flood, the history of Israel as a nation and other information which provides a historical perspective for current believers. The lives of many great believers of Old Testament times are discussed, both successes and failures. Angels and Satan are discussed. Sin is generally defined. Then there are the Books of Wisdom which are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon which remain valid as generally wise information about life and also includes basic information about God's character and faithfulness. There is much to be learned from all of this information, although it is very basic to the spiritual life, and not the source of primary spiritual growth information for the Church. So although the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament was fulfilled by the Messiah Jesus Christ, and therefore has been set aside after the cross and replaced by the New Testament, many non-Law portions remain valid and useful for our general instruction. And all unfulfilled prophecies must be fulfilled. But the primary instruction and direction regarding the spiritual life of the Church is in the New Testament. The Old Testament is no longer directive, but is now mainly illustrative, serving to provide information about God's divine standards regarding sin, defining the principles of human freedom, and generally providing information about how mankind has both succeeded and failed during human history in relation to God's will. To sum up, the Old Testament remains useful in many ways, but it is not the main part of our spiritual food which enables our spiritual growth. The Old Testament is very basic spiritual information compared with what the New Testament offers. So if a believer is going to grow spiritually they must do it primarily using the information from the New Testament, which is our new covenant.

As discussed earlier, the Books of Wisdom which includes Job, Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon provide mostly succinct statements of common sense wisdom and basic principles regarding faith in God which apply to all Ages. A good example is the Book of Proverbs, which is an

aphorism-based method of providing spiritual common sense information applicable to all Ages of time. Examples include pithy sayings about being humble, faithfully serving God, avoiding people who are bad influences, trusting the Lord, and fulfilling obligations. Some examples include:

Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

Proverbs 22:6 “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”

Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Proverbs 31:10 “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.”

Many of the Psalms also provide the same instructive type of pithy wisdom:

Psalm 9:1 “I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.”

Psalm 16:8 “I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Psalm 19:1 “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

Psalm 37:4 “Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Such succinct sayings and advice formed the basis of learning to trust God during Old Testament times. That was a time of simple faith as a means to please God, and that faith was based on simple lessons. Their spiritual life was therefore very simplistic, and the results were also spiritually simple and basic. In contrast, Church Age believers have a deep and complex spiritual life based on understanding the deep concepts and doctrines of the New Testament. These bring us closer to understanding God and lead to a spiritual life based on the power of the Holy Spirit which has far greater impact than was ever possible during Old Testament times. The reality of the cross made that possible, since God was able to expand the spiritual life exponentially after the cross occurred. Trying to go back and live the simplistic spiritual life of the Old Testament is like trying to regain childhood. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said “but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me” (I Corinthians 13:10-11). The “completeness” was the completed

Bible, which provides an adult level knowledge of God as opposed to a child-like knowledge of God given during Old Testament times. And this new covenant level of knowledge is as close to knowing God as is possible this side of heaven, when we will truly and fully understand Him.

Therefore we can still learn from the Old Testament as instructive for Church Age believers even though we must not live under the Mosaic Law portion of the Old Testament as being directive to us. The key is learning from it, not living under its spiritual requirements as though they were directive. The Church gets its complex spiritual direction from the New Testament. The Old Testament should not be discarded since we can learn many lessons from it. But learning is different than taking it as directive. Certain provisions of the Old Testament were reiterated in the New Testament making them apply to the Church, but often in a changed manner reflecting God's grace approach. Church Age believers can use the timeless Old Testament basic spiritual truths as an interim level of spiritual support on their way to the advanced level of spiritual status only the New Testament can provide.

During Old Testament times God sent prophets who received spiritual information directly from God, performed miraculous signs and actions, and taught the people spiritual information. All of this ended after the cross. Although the Apostles were able to perform miracles for a short time, it was only to establish their spiritual authority to spread the gospel of Christ and teach spiritual truth to the world. These powers were taken away from them once the Church Age had been established and doctrines were written down in the epistles to the churches. Then the miracles ended and were not reestablished once the Church was on a firm foundation. The Church Age is a time when God requires believers to live a grace-based life of faith. He no longer uses miracles to impress us or teach us, as He did with the prophets during the Old Testament.

As already discussed, God established Israel to serve as His chosen people. They were chosen to perform two specific tasks, namely to evangelize the world, and to be the keepers of the Scriptures. Israel was given the Old Testament which was by necessity limited until the sin issue was actually resolved by the Messiah. Once the Messiah was presented to them but rejected, God needed to provide an alternate group to carry on the mission of evangelization and keep the Scriptures since the promised Kingdom (Millennium) to Israel was delayed. This alternate group became the Church which had special provisions since the cross had removed the sin issue, so God was able to provide the Church

with a greatly enhanced spiritual life much more fulfilling than He had been able to provide Israel before the sin issue was removed as an impediment. The Church does not set aside or replace Israel, so Israel's fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic promises were only delayed until the Millennium, not removed or transferred to the Church. God keeps the Church and Israel separate since both have unique taskings in God's plan. The Old Testament was given to Israel, and the New Testament was given to the Church, and these are never mixed. During the Church Age all Jewish believers are part of the Church, not a separate "chosen people" called Israel. In the Millennium the promises of the Millennial Kingdom in the Old Testament will be fulfilled to a regathered Israel and all prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled will be fulfilled at that time. There are also unfulfilled prophecies about the seven year Tribulation which will be fulfilled after the Rapture of the Church when the Age of Israel resumes and concludes during that seven year period.

During the Church Age many religious groups seek to implement the provisions of the Old Testament as directive to the spiritual detriment of their followers. Some seek to live in the Old Testament and revive what Jesus Christ has already accomplished and taken out of the way. These groups attempt to maintain what God has set aside. In essence, they seek to re-shackle themselves to an inferior covenant from which God has graciously freed us. Some try to keep Saturday or Sunday as a holy day. Others have priests and other levels of hierarchy attempting to replace or mimic the Levitical priesthood. The New Testament makes it clear that now believers are their own priest, and are each given full access to God on their own. Revelation 1:5-6 says: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." Other denominations attempt to make the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Mosaic Law the primary focus for worship, when in fact the Law has been fulfilled and set aside by Jesus Christ in favor of a grace approach, which although it includes morality based on grace it does not emphasize the issue of morality to the exclusion of grace. God Himself has not changed, but what He can offer based on the reality of the cross having actually occurred has changed. The New Testament reiterates the portions of the Old Testament which apply to the Church. The focus has been changed from living under a set of prohibitions and restrictions to living under the freedom to serve and worship God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

To conclude, Church Age believers can learn many lessons from the Old Testament, but must not use the Mosaic Law as a directive means of living the spiritual life God requires of us. The Church must live under the new covenant to the Church defined in the New Testament. And the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus Christ's salvation work on the cross set aside the Mosaic Law, and allowed God to provide greatly expanded grace to believers during the Church Age. Therefore the Old Testament remains instructive to Church Age believers in many ways, but it is not directive. We have been set free from it by our Savior Jesus Christ. For that we are very grateful.

Prayer

Prayer is a powerful tool for believers and is a much deeper concept than it might seem. Prayer is a means of communicating to God, expressing thanksgiving and gratefulness, worship, and special requests. All of that is clear. But the more difficult issues regarding the subject of prayer focus on the use of proper procedure to make prayer effective. The Bible says many things about prayer, and teaches us how to properly use this gracious gift from God. And it may surprise many that God ignores most prayers for one of several reasons. That is what makes prayer a deep subject of the Bible.

First, God never listens to the prayer of an unbeliever unless they are expressing an interest in knowing about God. Since this is a salvation related issue, God's response is to send the gospel message to that person so they can believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, but He will not do anything else an unbeliever might ask for. Unbelievers have no basis for prayer since they lack salvation, and therefore lack the human spirit, which is required for God to interact with any person. It does not matter that the unbeliever may be asking for something good and noble as a selfless act on behalf of someone else. God never listens to what an unbeliever has to say unless it is an expression of faith in Jesus Christ or expressing an interest in knowing God. And simply believing in God does not bring salvation, or allow God to hear prayers. Even Satan and the fallen angels believe in God, but that does not accomplish anything favorable for them. The Bible says "The fool says in his heart "There is no God"." (Psalm 14:1) That speaks for itself. Simply not being a fool does not bring salvation.

Secondly, God ignores the prayers of believers when they do not use the procedures outlined by God in His Word. Contrary to popular belief, God does not condone a sloppy approach to Himself, and He has specific requirements which must be met in order for the believer to be heard. God is a God of grace, but He is also a God of proper procedure, since after all He is God and we are sinful humans even though believers. We are dealing with a God who has gone to great lengths to enable us to have a relationship with Him, including to communicate with Him in prayer, but His perfection has requirements which are outlined in His Word. Those requirements are not burdensome since He allows us to approach Him in grace, but He requires it to be done properly. The first and most basic improper procedure is to approach God in prayer with unconfessed sin in the life. Isaiah 59:2 says: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will

not hear." God only hears prayers offered through the power of the Holy Spirit, and since the Holy Spirit's power (filling) is temporarily lost by sin, the power of the Holy Spirit must be regained on a continual basis. Of course, God has made that easy for us, but it requires confessing (citing) our sins directly to God the Father to regain the filling of the Holy Spirit since His power is quenched by any sin, and is not regained until the believer confesses his sins. 1 John 1:8-10 says: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." If a believer prays with unconfessed sin in the life he has no power for prayer since he is not filled with the Holy Spirit, so the prayers are not heard or answered. Therefore God simply ignores them unless it is a prayer for forgiveness of sins. The reason for confessing sins is that God requires continual positive decisions toward Him as part of our spiritual life. And that admission of sins is of itself a prayer, so all prayer should start with an introductory prayer requesting forgiveness for recent sins. The Holy Spirit can only empower us when there is no unconfessed sin in the life, and if we have piled up a few sins and only remember one sin and confess it, that positive act toward God clears out all sins all the way back. This issue of unconfessed sin makes it important to start every prayer with something like "Father, I have done (insert the sin)." Then the rest of the prayer will have power from the Holy Spirit. But most believers go for long periods of time without requesting forgiveness for sins. That means they are living without the power of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives, and it includes the prayer issue as well as all other spiritual issues. Ephesians 6:18 says "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." It is the Holy Spirit who makes our prayers effective. Therefore most prayers offered are never considered by God since they come from either unbelievers or believers out of fellowship, meaning they are not filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Although many believe God finds any form of sincerity or earnestness to be acceptable, God must always protect His perfect essence when dealing with mankind. As such, there are proper procedures which must be followed any time people interface with God, including the use of prayer. As we see, the above discussion about proper procedure shows why God ignores most prayers which are offered. God does not try to make things difficult for us, He simply must protect His own perfect character. When mortal deals with spiritual, it requires spiritual power.

Effective prayer also requires faith, and our faith is made stronger by continual learning of God's Word which enables us to grow spiritually. It is the believer with a soul and spirit filled with God's Word who has an effective prayer life. If we do not believe God will provide for us, that lack of faith hinders our prayers. James 1:5 says: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."

There are other basic requirements for prayer. We pray to God the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it is the salvation work of Jesus Christ who redeemed us which makes every prayer possible. We do not pray to Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit, and certainly not to Mary or any other human. And each Church Age believer is his own priest before God, so we do not pray through another human as a priest. Again, the issue is proper procedure if we want to be heard.

The Holy Spirit is instrumental in effective prayer. Romans 8:26 says: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." This is why having the filling of the Holy Spirit is vital to our spiritual life, and a requirement for effective prayer.

Prayer is not needed for most things in life. God knows the needs of His believers and provides most of the basics without being asked. God knows we need to be protected, and that we need a job to provide for our family, and that we need the basics of life to stay alive and fulfill our responsibilities. God provides these basic needs whether we pray for them or not, although there is nothing wrong with asking for specifics regarding daily needs. Prayer should mostly be used for several categories of communicating with God expressing our gratitude to Him, to ask for intervention for other believers in need, to make special requests regarding our own life, to pray for those in authority over us to enable the gospel and Bible teaching to be spread, and other items as we may think deserve mentioning. Generally the requests are made in that order when in an extended prayer session. Gratitude includes telling God how much we appreciate Him and what He has done for us even though we are undeserving. We also should ask God to help specific people and groups in need by requesting Him to intercede on behalf of them and their needs. Asking for ourselves is certainly legitimate but should be

prayed in view of how it would result in greater glorification of God in our lives. As an illustration, God is not likely to answer prayers for winning the lottery, finding buried treasure, winning a sporting event, and such. These do not have God's glory and worship in mind, and prayer is certainly a form of worship. We must not pray for things which are in violation of Biblical principles, such as praying for something which is a sin, praying against other believers, praying for God to intervene and take sides in sporting events and games of chance, or praying for God to directly change someone's mind about something. We must not pray that an unbeliever will believe in Christ, since that is a violation of the free will of the individual which God does not authorize. But we can pray that an unbeliever or group may have the gospel made very clear to them. We should also not pray for a miracle. Everything God does for us is a miracle, no matter how small. Even so, God does not perform miracles such as direct healing during our stage of the Church Age which is past the time of the Apostles. If He wants us to be healed He will provide a means. We should pray that God will provide special care for a person (believers only) and take care of their needs, but we must never demand a miracle. This is not an exhaustive list but simply provides information about how to properly pray by citing some examples.

Regarding prayers for the nation, the main way for God to take care of a nation is for that nation to have a maximum number of believers, and for those believers to be growing in the Word and living the spiritual life God requires of them. That is far more effective than prayer. There are signs in yards all over the United States which say "Prayer is the Only Answer". That is misguided. The answer to most issues in life is not prayer, but rather pleasing God. We please God by living the spiritual life outlined for us in the New Testament, not by praying for God to do something we want done. What God wants is for people to accept salvation and grow spiritually, which in turn allows God to provide greater blessings to individuals, groups and nations. Prayer for an apostate nation is not very effective, unless it is for maximum spreading of the gospel message and maximum spreading of God's truth to the believers in the nation. If accepted by individuals from their own free will, those changes will heal a nation which is in a downward spiral, but prayer for healing an apostate nation apart from spiritual changes will have no result. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Once again we see the difference is asking in prayer for people to hear the gospel and the truth of God's Word, not asking God to heal a nation

apart from spiritual changes. And God does not reach into people's minds and switch their free will in another direction. God does not directly change anyone's mind, ever, for any reason.

Aside from the proper procedure issue, most believers pray from the misguided sense of assuming God should give us what we want. On the contrary, God will give all believers the basics of what they need to survive without prayer for those needs, since He always takes care of His own. Beyond that, if we are growing spiritually and living the spiritual life God has outlined for us, and we have continually confessed our sins so the Holy Spirit consistently empowers us, then our prayer options are greatly expanded and are actually heard by God. These are the only believers who have a meaningful prayer life. Then on more rare occasions we should pray for unusual things we would like to have, for self or others, which are beyond the normal prayers, and with the understanding that it is God's will and glory which are important, not our personal desires. When we pray in that way, God can answer our prayers. But believers rarely follow God's procedures for prayer, and they rarely approach God in a worshipful manner, but instead use a "gimme this" attitude, and most such prayers are ignored by God. James 4:3 says: "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." Most believers make prayer about what they want so they can be happy. God's plan is for us to be happy regardless of circumstances. Grace and proper procedure are not incompatible. They are closely linked. We are dealing with perfect God.

As mentioned earlier, praying for miracles is not a valid prayer during the current Church Age. Miracles were used by the Lord and by His disciples and Apostles to show those who did not know them that their authority was truly from God. The purpose was to show the legitimacy of the messenger, and only secondarily to heal people or relieve suffering. Jesus did not try to heal everyone on earth when He was present since that was not God's plan. His purpose for miracles was to present Himself as the legitimate Messiah, and set Himself apart from false messiahs. Today, if one of our loved ones is ill or dying, we should ask God for special care for that person, to do all that is possible for them, or similar prayers, and ask for His will to be done. But we must not demand miracles from God. God can figure out what is needed, and we must respect that. When we allow God to choose, He is glorified and His plan is accomplished.

Jesus provided a prayer to His disciples which has come to be known as "The Lord's Prayer" but should actually be called "The Disciple's Prayer." Although Churches all over the world pray this prayer, that prayer was meant for a specific point in time leading up to the cross. Jesus asked His disciples to pray for the Millennial Kingdom to be accepted and begin in the prayer which says "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done", which Kingdom Jesus was offering to Israel during His First Advent and could have been accepted by them. But shortly afterward Israel rejected Jesus Christ as their King, so the Kingdom (Millennium) was delayed and the Church Age was inserted instead of it. Therefore God's will was not done on earth as it is in heaven. As a result that prayer is no longer valid, at least not that portion which says: "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven" since it is related to the Millennial Kingdom which Jesus Christ was offering, and that offer expired when the cross occurred. Today during the Church Age we do not pray for the Kingdom, although it is certainly a future Age in God's plan, even though delayed. We are not Israel, the Kingdom will only come on God's timing, and no one knows the day or the hour. (Matthew 24:36) The rest of the prayer is related to how the disciples would suffer for supporting Jesus, and for how they would be tested and tempted by Satan since the disciples were entering a new phase without Jesus, and they would face many temptations to lose heart and depart from their mission to spread the gospel, hence the "lead us not into temptation" and "deliver us from the evil one (Satan)." We as Church Age believers need to formulate our own prayers in a manner which applies to our point in time during the Church Age, just as Jesus formulated an example of praying during His time. For instance, if we want to pray about the future, we could pray for the future believers of the Great Tribulation who will suffer tremendously and will be martyred in large numbers. We could pray that Israel will be protected from its many enemies. We could pray that the gospel and Bible teaching will be spread into countries which oppose Christianity and are generally closed to the gospel. We can pray for many things relevant to our time and the future. But Israel can no longer accept the Kingdom since that offer has expired, so praying "Thy Kingdom come" is useless since it is not part of God's current plan. As mentioned in the introduction to this book, many long held misconceptions will be challenged during this study. The "Lord's Prayer" issue is certainly one of those. The temptation is to get mad about it. But it would be better to think about what the Bible is actually teaching, not what has been endlessly and mindlessly repeated over generations. God has ignored every prayer for "Thy Kingdom come" since that Kingdom was rejected by Israel in AD 33. But He will listen to prayers such as "may your gospel and truth be spread throughout the entire world." That applies today, but the Kingdom does not.

Prayer before a meal has become a tradition based on Jesus Christ having asked a blessing before eating on several occasions, including during the two separate feedings of the large crowds with a small number of loaves and fishes, and also before the Last Supper. Also, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says: "give thanks in all circumstances..." Saying a prayer prior to meals is giving thanks to God for what He has provided, and admitting dependence on His grace. That is why the meal prayer is called a "grace prayer" or simply "grace." It is also a good way to teach the importance of prayer to young family members, teaching them early that God provides for them in all things.

The Bible tells us to "Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) These go together as a package. Prayer is not meant to be used only for requests. We are grateful to God, and happy with what He has done for us and provided to us, so in prayer we also thank Him and praise Him.

Prayer is a powerful gift given to believers by God. It is only a deep doctrine because it is so poorly understood by most believers who use improper procedure and therefore most of their prayers are not heard and have little or no impact. When used in a sloppy manner with self-serving motivation and/or apart from the power of the Holy Spirit it is ignored by God. But when used as prescribed by the Word of God and under the power of the Holy Spirit and backed by faith it has enormous impact and serves to glorify Jesus Christ while also supporting the interests of His believers.

The Soul and Human Spirit

Believers have two parts to their immaterial being, both a soul and human spirit, which are separate but connected. Unbelievers have only a soul without a human spirit. The Bible makes it clear there is a difference between the soul and human spirit. Hebrews 4:12 says: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says: "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And Isaiah 26:9 tells us "My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you." The soul and spirit are therefore separate and distinct immaterial entities with different functions and purposes. The human spirit is not the same thing as the Holy Spirit indwelling and filling the believer. The human spirit is a second portion of the immaterial life of the believer, and although it is interconnected with the soul it is entirely separate. The soul is the "human" part of the believer while the human spirit is the "spiritual" part. This is why unbelievers have no human spirit, since they are not spiritual beings, only soulish ones.

Adam and Eve were created with both a soul and human spirit. And their souls were created as male and female as well as their bodies. Genesis 1:27 says: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Genesis is talking about the image of God, which is not the body, when male and female are mentioned as being created. When they sinned by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the one forbidden tree, their human spirits are what died. At that point they had only a soul and no human spirit. As God had warned them if they ate from it "you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17), and God meant their human spirits would die, which is spiritual death. That is what defines spiritual death, that the human spirit is dead and the person only has a soul. They remained physically alive for hundreds of years afterward, so it did not mean physical death. As the first humans showed a person can live without a human spirit since they did not immediately die physically, but a person cannot have a relationship with God without it. After they sinned they hid from God since they had no ability to interact with Him, but God offered salvation to them which they both accepted, and at that point their human spirits were revived. But as a result of the original sin all their descendants are born without a human spirit, and salvation is required to obtain one. Therefore all people are born with a soul but no human spirit. The only exception was

Jesus Christ who was born perfect with both a soul and a human spirit (spiritually alive) therefore He did not need salvation. At the moment of faith in Jesus Christ (and during the Old Testament by faith in the promised Messiah) the human spirit is revived, and from that time on the person is spiritually alive and has both a soul and a spirit forever.

We are spiritually reborn at salvation, which is going from spiritual death to spiritual life. That is when the person becomes a spiritual being. As John 3:3 says: "Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." Being "born again" is the rebirth of the human spirit at the moment of salvation. Prior to salvation a person has only a soul but no human spirit, and is unable to interact with God in any way except to receive salvation by faith. As we see from the lives of unbelievers, only a soul is necessary to be a functional human being, and the human spirit is not. But without a human spirit that person cannot function spiritually in any way, and they also cannot live with God in eternity. This is why salvation must be a gift from God, not something to be earned over time, since no unbeliever can please God in any way or earn anything because none are spiritual beings. God makes humans into spiritual beings at the point of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, not as a result of anything the person does to earn it.

But what is a human spirit, how does it differ from the soul, and why do we need both?

Both the soul and human spirit are immaterial, and therefore are directly created and given by God. Neither come into existence in a material way, either in the mother's womb or in the body itself, since they are not part of the material world and are not made of elements from the universe. The immaterial soul is imparted to the physical body by God at the point of birth and this makes the person soulishly alive. But only the human spirit can make a person spiritually alive, and that only occurs at salvation. If there is no salvation during the lifetime that person remains spiritually dead forever (except for those who die as children and those with very low mental function). The human spirit is necessary to understand spiritual information and to have interaction with God. As 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: "The person without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness." Romans 8:16 says: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." For humans to interact with God they must have a human spirit, otherwise God cannot interact with them, and they cannot understand God or His spiritual truth.

Therefore a spiritual life is only possible through use of the human spirit. That human spirit has four main purposes. First, it makes the person spiritually alive and therefore enables interaction with God. Only spirit can interact with Spirit, therefore no unbeliever can interact with God. Secondly, the human spirit makes spiritual information from the Word of God understandable, and no person can truly understand spiritual information apart from the human spirit but "considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them." Third, the human spirit enables the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit which empowers the spiritual life of believers. As mentioned above, Romans 8:16 says: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" which shows how the Holy Spirit uses the spiritual information contained in our human spirit, and builds up our faith as a result of it. Finally, the human spirit is the storage location for spiritual information. The human soul cannot store spiritual information since it is not designed to do so. Therefore spiritual information must be stored in the human spirit where it becomes usable in the life of the believer, then it is accessed by the soul and used in the spiritual life.

In contrast to the human spirit which is focused on the spiritual, the human soul is the center of human life and interfaces with the material world, and for the believer it also interfaces with God because it is backed by the human spirit. The soul is given at the moment of birth, being put into the physical body directly by God, but the human spirit is not given at birth. The soul is the location of the central processor for the person, called the "heart" in the Bible, which pulls together inputs from the entire soul and then interfaces with the outside material world. And if the person is a believer, the soul interfaces with God through the heart because it is supported by a human spirit. The soul also has other components listed in the Bible including the "mind" which is the mentality or thinking part of the soul. The soul also contains the memory where it stores information related to the material world, such as vocabulary, subject information, events, past actions, visual information, tastes, sounds, music, and so on. Additionally, the soul contains the emotions, conscience, free will, and other innate human functions. And the soul is the center of the self-awareness of being alive, called the self-consciousness. The various components of the soul support the soul's heart in its integrating and processing function. Therefore the soul defines us as rational human beings unlike animals which have no soul.

The Bible describes the heart as the core part of the soul, the essential being of the person, and the central processor which integrates all soul and human spirit functions, making the heart the nerve center of the soul. The immaterial heart is functionally analogous to the body's physical pump which nourishes and sustains the human body with oxygen, nutrients, immune defenses, heating and cooling, and numerous other functions. And since the true life of the person is the soul, and that soul lives forever, the soul and its heart require a more detailed explanation. Proverbs 4:32 says: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." We see the "flow" analogy as with the physical pump of the body, meaning the soul's heart pumps the "flow" of outputs from the soul into the material world and pulls information back into the soul from the material world. As such the heart expresses what is in the soul of the person, whether good or bad. And for the believer the heart is also the means of flowing spiritual information into and out from the human spirit. Spiritual thoughts originate in the human spirit and flow out of the soul through the heart toward God and people, and spiritual learning flows back into the human spirit through the heart. The heart also decides whether to allow information to enter the soul, and can either accept or reject it. Therefore the heart is also the gatekeeper of the soul. In all of this the heart is not just passing everything through, but rather the heart filters and processes information, makes decisions, and forms the thoughts and intentions, which are then expressed out from the soul.

The soul of the believer is the instrument of applying spiritual information contained in the human spirit toward both God and the material world, therefore spiritual information flows out through the soul's heart. The human spirit can only reach the outside world through the soul's heart which serves as the gatekeeper of the two immaterial parts of the person. As such the human spirit relies on the soul to give expression to what is contained in the human spirit. The believer's soul and spirit work together, and that working relationship becomes more powerful and effective as the believer grows spiritually, building up the storage of spiritual truths inside the spirit which then flow out through the soul. And that storage of spiritual information in the human spirit is not in a simple form, but rather the human spirit manufactures a complex interconnected web out of the spiritual information it receives, combining simple concepts with more advanced principles, which builds up faith as a person matures spiritually. But if the human spirit of the believer is empty, as with a new believer or one who has never grown spiritually, the soul will go to the human spirit for spiritual information but find little or nothing there since it is empty or nearly so. This is why studying the Word of God is so crucial,

because it is the basis of spiritual growth and puts information into the human spirit which can be accessed and used by the soul, and provides the Holy Spirit with spiritual information to work with. Additionally, recall the earlier discussion that the believer must continually request forgiveness of sins to take them out of the way and enable the Holy Spirit to function in the spirit-soul processes. If unconfessed sins remain in the life the spiritual processes inside the believer are severely restricted, and the human spirit is effectively shut off from the soul.

Spiritual information must be stored and structurally assembled inside the human spirit for the Holy Spirit to use to empower the spiritual life. Spiritual growth increases by packing the human spirit with information from the Word of God which provides a higher level of spiritual function for that believer, fulfillment of God's plan, and greater glorification of God through Jesus Christ. Feeding spiritual information into the human spirit is the only means of increasing faith in a meaningful manner, one which works under testing and pressure. Therefore believers must grow up spiritually by building up the spiritual information inside the human spirit so the Holy Spirit can provide maximum power in the life of the believer by putting that spiritual information into use. Hebrews 6:19 says about the human spirit filled with the Word of God: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain." The human spirit as the "inner sanctuary" is compared to the layout of the Temple of Israel, whereby the human spirit is analogous to the Holy of Holies which had the presence of God, and the soul of the believer is like the outer areas of the Temple where interaction with the outside world occurred on different levels.

When discussing the innermost being of mankind the Bible most often uses the word "heart" rather than "soul." The NIV version of the Bible refers to the immaterial "heart" over 800 times, about 200 of which are in the New Testament, but the word "soul" is only used 95 times in the Bible of which 23 are in the New Testament. This shows the importance of the heart as the main component of the soul. The functions and attributes ascribed to the immaterial heart in the Bible include thinking/thoughts, intentions, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, deciding, believing, remembering, love, meditation, reflection, pondering, purposing, seeking, searching, humility, obedience, gladness, caring, tenderness, compassion, joy, self-reflection, yearning, cheerfulness, hope, peace, and on the negative side the Bible says it is also the source of arrogance, foolishness, anger, envy, pride, jealousy, darkness, hardness, folly, deceit, evil thoughts, impenitence, obstinacy, wickedness, perversity, lusting, coveting, and many

other negative things. The Bible says the heart treasures things (good or evil), is the source of the secrets of the person, conceives plans, sorrows, can be heavy, and can be dejected and in anguish. It is also the means of expressing worship toward God. As such, the heart is the central engine of the soul, the central processor which integrates and pulls together all the complex components and facets of the soul, makes decisions, and expresses thoughts and intentions toward God and the entire outside world. Comparing the outputs of the heart with the overall characteristics of the human soul we find the heart integrates the self consciousness, mind, conscience, emotion, and memory which are all separate from the heart, yet are all component parts of the soul. Everything which comes out from a person toward either God or the outside world comes out from and through the heart. God is highly focused on the thoughts and intentions of the person, and He evaluates each person based on their heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 says: "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." It is therefore clear that the heart is the inner core, the essential nature, the highest functioning piece of the inner immaterial person, both believer and unbeliever, and therefore provides the majority of the soul's important functions.

The Bible distinguishes the heart from other immaterial components of the soul, including the "mind". Psalm 26:2 says "Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind;" and Philippians 4:7 "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" and Jeremiah 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind" and Mark 12:30 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." All these distinguish between the heart and the mind. As noted, the heart of the person is the central processor of the soul. The mind is the part of the soul which takes perceptions and information from the outside world brought in through the senses, and combines them with what is already known, and puts it into a format the heart can use called "understanding." The mind gives that understanding to the heart where it can be processed, and the heart combines the understanding from the mind with inputs from the other parts of the soul such as the conscience and other soul component advisors. Then the heart exercises the free will of the person by making decisions, and forms integrated "thoughts and intentions" based on all the inputs from the component parts of the soul and spirit, plus inputs from the attached sinful nature, forming expressions both outward and inward. The heart will make the final decision about any given issue after being advised by the mind, conscience, emotions, memory, and all facets of the soul's component "advisors" to the heart. And the sinful nature

is another advisor, being a usurper advisor attached to the soul although not inside it, and is often a very powerful and influential advisor to the heart. And if the person is a believer, the human spirit also advises the heart of the soul. But if the human spirit is empty, there will be no input from it, leaving the decision in the hands of the lesser capable soul functions often under the influence of the sinful nature. But when the human spirit is full of the Word of God, which is called "wisdom", the heart will value its inputs as the best and most important to consider, even if the heart does not always make the right decision spiritually. That is because the sinful nature is an ever-present force acting on the soul which must be continually dealt with. The result is internal soul conflict whereby the heart is pulled in different directions, on one hand by the sinful nature and on the other hand by the human spirit. Having a sinful nature which can exert such influences means we never stop sinning, although we can control it to some degree when the human spirit is full of spiritual information and under the control of the Holy Spirit.

While unbelievers have only a soul, and believers have both a soul and human spirit, all humans have an additional non-physical part of them which did not come from God, namely the sinful nature which is attached to the soul, but not inside it or even part of it. We have noted how Proverbs 4:22 says "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." The "guarding" refers to the sinful nature, which although not a core internal component of the soul is attached to the soul as an illegitimate advisor to the heart, and is the source of temptations which attempt to get the heart to decide in favor of things the heart knows to be wrong, or should know to be wrong. The sinful nature became an attachment to the soul after the fall of Adam and Eve, since God did not create them with a sinful nature attached. As a result of the fall of Adam and Eve all of their descendants are born spiritually dead (i.e., no human spirit) and also inherit the legacy of the sinful nature attached to the soul at birth. But since Jesus Christ was born spiritually alive due to supernatural conception which avoided Adam's sinful legacy, Jesus was the only person ever born without a sinful nature. The sinful nature as the source of internal temptation has its own unique areas of weakness to certain types of sins, and these weaknesses are learned and developed over time but some may also be inherited. The sinful nature weaknesses to sins are not merely carnal weaknesses, but also include arrogance, hatred, envy, jealousy, anger and other such mental sins which are very harmful since they create bundled sinning, initiating a cycle of destructive sins. These mental sins become both inwardly destructive and also destructive toward others, including expressions outwardly as sins of the tongue. James 3:6 says "The

tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." The reference to "hell" refers to the sinful nature as being a part of Satan's domain, since he is its originator. The sinful nature weaknesses also create lust patterns including examples such as lust for power, money, sex, esteem, and many other lusts, and at the extreme end the sinful nature can motivate lust for heinous acts such as torture and murder. Lust can take many forms, and has both carnal and self righteous sides to it, therefore lust is not limited to the carnal types most commonly associated with it.

If the sinful nature is not controlled, it will become the dominant force in the life of a person, including believers. For believers the way to minimize its influence is by constant study and use of the Word of God which fills the human spirit with spiritual information, which is a sort of spiritual inoculation against the sinful nature. But if the sinful nature gets out of control to an excessive degree the believer's human spirit is shut off and all types of sins can become possible. The unchecked sinful nature is the source of great evil in the world, including evil dictators who are used by Satan, and the ultimate expression of this will be in the future Antichrist during the Tribulation. For unbelievers, when the sinful nature is allowed to control the soul to a near total degree it can open the unbeliever's soul to demon possession, which although a rare condition it will certainly be true of the Antichrist. However, no believer can be demon possessed, only influenced by Satan's Cosmic System through the sinful nature. The sinful nature out of control is where heinous crimes become possible in some people when the condition continues long enough, as the conscience becomes broken down over time. And the person is able to justify these to self based on the sinful nature blaming the victims using distorted mental patterns of bundled sins. Even for a believer the sinful nature's influence can become strong if allowed to gain maximum control in the life, and the believer will live a life of sin. All of this is because the sinful nature is part of Satan's realm, since he was the source of it by enticing Adam and Eve to sin and die spiritually. Romans 5:12 says "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned." Adam made the choice for all mankind when he sinned because he did it intentionally, but Eve was deceived. Therefore Adam was the source of spiritual death and the sinful nature for his descendants, so the sinful nature is passed down from Adam, not from Eve. This is where the miraculous conception of Jesus apart from a human father cut off the sinful nature, therefore He was born without one and also had a human spirit at birth.

So the advisors of the heart are not always looking out for the best interests of the person, but are often in disagreement about which course of action to take. And the components advise in alignment with what they have been taught, or learned the hard way, or developed in other ways. For instance, the conscience is different from one person to another, and is not necessarily correct about what is right and wrong. The soul as created by God is empty, and each person fills it as they go along in life, whether good or bad, but usually a mixture. For believers the human spirit is filled up with spiritual truths if that believer takes in spiritual food regularly under the teaching ministry of a Pastor who is well trained in the Bible. And the sinful nature is also filled up as the person grows, picking up lust patterns and areas of weakness to certain sins, some more than others. Parental discipline and hard knocks along the way help keep the development of the sinful nature under some control, enabling the person to function in society.

There is a lifelong battle in the soul of each person over which advisors the soul's heart listens to when making decisions. On the one hand are the logical advisors to the heart, including the mind, conscience, memory, and also for believers the human spirit. These logical advisors are normally aligned in opposition to the sinful nature, with its sinful tendencies and lust patterns, which is continually seeking to gain the upper hand as an illicit advisor to the heart. The soul's emotions can take the side of the sinful nature and make bad decisions more difficult to avoid. The emotions do not think, so they merely respond to either the heart backed by the logical advisors or else to the sinful nature. The emotions were designed by God to respond to the heart in alignment with the logical advisors of the soul, however they can also misalign with the sinful nature. That makes the emotions the "wild card" of the soul, sometimes aligning with the logical advisors, and sometimes aligning with the sinful nature. And the sinful nature is the source of lusts, which come in many varieties, and can be very different for each person. When the emotions become the near permanent ally of the sinful nature, the two combined overwhelm the heart and essentially stage a coup, taking over the thought processes. In such a case the emotions become what is referred to in the Bible as a "prostitute" of the soul, seeking the illegitimate company of the sinful nature rather than the legitimate company of the heart. And since the sinful nature is the ally of Satan, the person becomes allied with Satan's Cosmic System, which is opposition to God. And that is true for believers as well as unbelievers. This is how the emotions can create instability inside the soul when allied with the sinful nature, and if severe enough it can result in

overall mental instability. This is how continuous sinning most often develops, when the logical advisors are ignored by the heart in favor of the sinful nature which has gained the alliance of the emotions. And since unbelievers have no human spirit, the sinful nature is harder to avoid and therefore is often the dominant influence on their heart. When the heart of the soul is taken over by the sinful nature backed by the emotions, the logical advisors of the soul, including the human spirit for the believer, are mostly shut off from influencing the heart, while the sinful nature and emotions run the soul. And over time the logical advisors even become corrupted, as the mind and conscience take on distorted patterns and cease to be logical. For many it is revealed as rebellion against legitimate authority and general poor decision making leading to an unstable life, and this can be mild or severe. As it progresses it can result in wide mood swings, increased rebellion against all forms of authority, self-destructive tendencies, and other forms of disruptive and dysfunctional behavior. As this continues there can be panic attacks as the person attempts to think but comes up empty, since the logical advisors of the soul are shut off, creating what the Bible calls a "vacuum in the soul." The person literally cannot think clearly since neither the sinful nature nor the emotions are logical or rational. Therefore the inputs which get through to the heart are from these non-thinking sources, and the person's soul get more and more out of control. Depression, neurosis, psychosis and any of the forms of mental instability and self-destructive behavior become possible at that point. On the extremely severe end of the spectrum this is where mass murderers and other heinous criminals develop their twisted souls. It also explains why different people can have such divergent views on the same subject when presented with the same information. Some people look at life from the viewpoint of the soul under the control of the heart accepting the advice of the logical advisors inside the soul and the human spirit for the believer, and other people look at life from the viewpoint of the heart under the control of the sinful nature backed by emotions which are out of control, relegating the logical advisors of the soul to a position of low regard. These two viewpoints are 180 degrees out of phase. If this out of control state inside the soul exists long enough the heart will essentially be bypassed by the combined sinful nature and emotions, which end up doing the "pseudo thinking" for the person. But in reality it is not thought at all, but rather pure Cosmic System emotional expression from a soul which is out of control and under the near-total influence of the sinful nature. This is the meaning of "hardness of heart" used many places in the Bible. "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." (Ephesians 4:18) The only way to counter and overcome the sinful nature-emotions lock on the soul is through a

very intensive study of the Word of God, but at this point that is very difficult. Hardness of the heart is a Bible analogy to hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis), whereby the heart of the soul is barely able to operate due to being shut off from the flow required to allow it to function.

God is said to have a heart in Acts 13:22, Jeremiah 3:15, and 1 Samuel 2:35. And Genesis 1:27 says "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." The heart of the soul and human spirit are what mirror God's essence to the degree that we are alive in a soul which is somewhat like God who is alive with self consciousness, thinking and so on. And the human spirit gives us spiritual expression. God created mankind as creatures with a soul containing self consciousness and free will and many functions which mirror His own inner Being, but of course on a much lower scale. And a human spirit is required to interact with God in any way. It takes both a soul and human spirit to be in the image of God. Without a human spirit part of that image is missing. Unbelievers are therefore missing a critical piece of the image of God, and without it they can never have a relationship with Him unless that missing piece is regained by salvation.

For those who think the heart is primarily a source of good intentions, think again. Satan has a heart, and it is pure evil. Isaiah 14:13 describes what Satan thought when he chose to revolt against God: "You [Satan] said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God." As we have seen with humans, the soul and human spirit are two very separate parts of the immaterial part of the believer while unbelievers have only a soul but no human spirit. This is also true of angels, separating God's elect angels from Satan and his fallen angels. Elect angels have both soul and spirit, while Satan and fallen angels have only a soul without a spirit since they lost it at their fall when they revolted against God. Therefore fallen angels have no ability to have a relationship with God. Angels have the exact same soul (and spirit for elect angels) as humans, just in different body types. That is because mankind was created to resolve the angelic conflict between God and Satan, and the only fair way to do it was by having the exact same immaterial components in both humans and angels. And the issues related to a soul getting out of control are the same in fallen angels as in mankind, which is why Satan and fallen angels are so evil. The soul of angels will be covered in more detail later in this book.

The Bible never uses the word "brain" or anything referring to the gray matter in the head of humans. Instead, the heart is always used as the source of man's cognitive integrating functions, which is the reality of human life. The human physical brain is a material interface and sensing device which enables the immaterial part of man to interact with the material world, especially on a sensory level. But the human brain is not the location or source of thoughts, conscience, volition, emotions, memory or other essentially human cognitive functions, but rather it is merely the means of conveying information into and out from the soul. The exception for what might be called "memory" is sensory memory, which is located in the physical brain and is the type of memory which holds information about smells, tastes, touch, sounds, muscle memory (such as sports training), and other sensory type storage which is used by the senses to identify sensory data based on prior experiences. This sensory experience memory is why athletes can perform certain routine repetitive actions without the engagement of the soul memory. Some examples include walking and running, a golf or tennis swing, ice skating, basketball shooting, baseball and football throwing, and so on which are based on sensory memory stored in the brain and only supported from the soul. The soul remembers why the action needs to be done and makes decisions about doing the action, but the physical brain remembers how to accomplish the physical act. Therefore the material brain is a two-way interface and sensing device which acts like a computer interface for the purpose of translating incoming sensory information into inputs for the soul, and also takes human soul outputs from the immaterial heart and translates them into outgoing material signaling and mechanical outputs which control the body senses, muscle movements, and other actions. These actions are often accomplished using the brain's sensory memory after the soul directs the action to be accomplished. Regarding incoming information, the brain controls how the senses interact with the outside world, and deliver that sensory information to the soul, and the part of the soul which interfaces with the brain is called the "mind" in the Bible. Brain damage can interfere with soul outputs and inputs, but such damage does not change or eliminate what was already contained in the immaterial soul. Therefore a person with memory diseases such as Alzheimer's or dementia merely cannot get what is in the soul out through the body, meaning the core person and their memories are not lost or even changed. The soul can be closed off to some degree by the body, but that does not destroy what was already in the soul. The soul will be the same after death, regardless of what the body may have shut off from being expressed by the soul or taken into the soul during life.

The fact that the soul is the source of so many negatives also proves that the sinful nature is attached to the soul, even though not inside the soul. The sinful nature is variously called "the old self", "the flesh", and "the sin" in the singular. It is the part of the soul which Satan "owns" since he was the source of its creation at the fall of man. So the sinful nature is how Satan's Cosmic System influences people, and this is true whether it is a believer or unbeliever. Genesis 8:21 says "every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood." This is because every person is born under the control and influence of the sinful nature. And as the person grows up mentally as a human being, the sinful nature develops faster than the soul's logical advisors, and this is especially evident during the teen years. Therefore human "mental growth" is less about brain development than soul development, since soul development is the only way to develop the logical advisors of the soul in a way which opposes the sinful nature's influences on the heart of the soul. This is the battle as a person grows up to human maturity, for unbelievers as well as believers, as the human soul fights to gain logical advantages primarily in the conscience over the sinful nature in order to keep the sinful nature under control to some degree. And illogical thinking and actions come from the soul, not from the human brain. Although unbelievers have no salvation, they can still develop their soul's logical advisors into overall conformity with God's divine laws for every human, including such things as respect for parents, family values, monogamous marriage, hard work, playing fair, helping neighbors, and so on. An unbeliever can be outwardly very moral in actions, and not much different than many believers due to God's divine laws which encourage general decency among all people. This is a matter of promoting a stable society where all are free to choose for or against God. Therefore these divine laws are meant for the entire human race, unbelievers as well as believers. But it is more difficult for unbelievers to deal with mental sins without a human spirit. Salvation activates the human spirit for the believer, then spiritual growth develops the human spirit, which provides the ultimate in human "mental development," which is in reality soul (and human spirit) spiritual development. It is a lifelong process which requires renovation of the soul and filling up the human spirit with the Word of God, which puts the sinful nature on the defensive. That is the point when believers become far more outwardly and inwardly moral than unbelievers. And remember in all of this, morality has nothing to do with salvation, since salvation is only through faith in Christ as Savior. And morality for unbelievers does not gain them salvation, but rather for them it is mainly a matter of supporting a stable society for human decisions as designed by God.

The sinful nature is attached to, although not an integral part of, the soul since it will be stripped off for all believers at the point of death, something like removing a leech from the body, or a barnacle from a boat's hull. Shedding the sinful nature at death removes all the negative influences inside the believer's soul, making the person ready for eternity. But unbelievers will retain their sinful nature and all its negative motivations for all eternity, since the Bible says they will have regrets, anger, remorse, and many other negatives during eternity. The believer will have none of these. For the unbeliever the sinful nature will be a secondary source of soul pain for all eternity, along with the intense physical pain. Unbelievers will live eternally with the same soul they had while alive, including their sinful nature. Eternity for unbelievers is called the Second Death because they enter eternity with no human spirit, and this spiritual death is forever. Believers are "born again" with a human spirit added at salvation, but unbelievers are eternally dead spiritually. There is no crossing over after the point of physical death since the unbeliever has no basis for a spiritual relationship with God, before or after death. Refusing salvation is refusing the human spirit, and there is no basis for interaction with God without it.

The storage of spiritual information in a usable form in the human spirit deserves more explanation. Believers may understand at a surface level that God will provide for them, but if they merely believe that from very limited input from a nearly empty human spirit providing input to their soul it will not have any staying power. It is only what we believe from the human spirit based on deeper levels of understanding of God's Word which has deep faith and power, and this provides opportunity for the Holy Spirit to help us apply that spiritual information. The Holy Spirit does not fill the human soul but rather the human spirit since it is the means of spiritual interaction. Spiritual information flows from the human spirit through the soul, since the soul is the interface to God and also to the outside material world. Spiritual truths are built up in the human spirit, like building a structure brick upon brick, and as that spiritual structure in the human spirit is built up, the faith and spiritual dynamics of the believer increases. It is the human spirit which is empowered by the Holy Spirit and makes the believer's spiritual life impactful and glorifying to God. In conjunction with this proper function of the human spirit, when the Word of God fills the human spirit and becomes the primary advisor to the heart, these two become aligned to enable the heart to have a consistent divine viewpoint which expresses God's Word in the majority of what the believer thinks, says, and does. That is a heart and soul which pleases God.

The unbeliever seeks to understand the world from a soulish viewpoint but comes up empty in many ways since the unbeliever is totally incapable of understanding God or spiritual truths, which is where real truth is obtained. Life has no real meaning since the true meaning of life is based on spiritual principles and having a relationship with God. All unbelievers generally live on Cosmic System thinking under the influence of the sinful nature since they cannot understand or use spiritual information. The exception is that God has set up a system of divine laws for all mankind to live under, which includes family, marriage, work, law and order, and general freedom to live life, and the unbeliever can enjoy these gifts from God to all mankind if they accept what God has established, even though it is not spiritual truth to them. But many nations reject God's system in favor of Satan's Cosmic System, overthrowing God's divine laws in favor of Satan's cosmic chaos. It is no coincidence that in such places people live hard lives at a basic level of subsistence, and that where God's truth is valued the people generally thrive.

Looking once again at Hebrews 4:12 which says: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow..." It is interesting to see the analogy of the soul and spirit as separated but joined, as with the blood-making marrow in the hip and the joint of the leg femur which is attached to the hip but moves separately. The marrow is hidden and is mainly for manufacture and growth of new blood cells until they are ready to go out into the body to nourish and protect it from invaders, and that egress is often through the hip joint vessels. And the leg femur is active and mobile, giving the body motion by interfacing with the outside world. Hebrews says God's Word pierces deeply into both soul and spirit, first through the soul, then into the human spirit, and then back out through the soul for application to the world around us. As such the Word of God finds its target in this deep penetration and changes the inner nature of the person, with Bible principles living and growing inside the human spirit as with the marrow growing new blood cells, then when ready the results go out and perform their assigned tasks. This shows how the human spirit not only stores the principles of the Word, but acts to grow and combine them in ways the Holy Spirit can use to empower a dynamic spiritual life. The result is a consistent divine viewpoint expressed through the heart, with fewer sinful aberrations. And all of this uses God's power, not the human power of the individual believer.

It is a sad reality that most believers do not properly use their human spirit. The human spirit requires constant feeding from the Word of God to function properly. Without that constant intake of spiritual food, the human spirit is empty or close to it, so the Holy Spirit has little to use to empower the spiritual life of the believer. Those who exercise their human spirit and feed it spiritual truth regularly will grow in spiritual strength and provide the Holy Spirit with what He requires to empower the believer to have impact for the Lord. Ephesians 6:10 says:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

With the consistent intake of spiritual food, the human spirit stores up information the Holy Spirit can use to empower an effective spiritual life of the believer. We are in the midst of spiritual warfare with the forces of darkness, and we must be armed to fight the spiritual battles. As the human spirit is exercised and trained in spiritual truth from the Word, the believer will grow in spiritual strength and have impact for the Lord in this spiritual warfare.

Therefore, believers have two immaterial components of their inner being while unbelievers have only one. Believers are spiritually alive while unbelievers lack a human spirit meaning they are spiritually dead. No unbeliever can ever work their way into favor with God or even have a relationship with God in either time or eternity apart from God's only way of salvation since they have no human spirit. A human spirit is required to interface with God in any way, except to receive the gift of salvation which is by a simple act of faith. The human spirit is only activated at salvation. If the unbeliever never accepts salvation by faith in Christ as Savior that person can never have a human spirit, and can never have any interaction with God. Regarding believers who actually have a human spirit, if their human spirit is malnourished due to lack of intake of God's Word, their spiritual life has little or no impact.

Only believers who regularly feed their human spirit and "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3: 18) will have a spiritual life with great impact under maximum power of the Holy Spirit. And the result for that believer will be a life of blessing followed by an eternity with significant rewards.

What is Evil?

The word "evil" is commonly used to describe a depraved person who engages in vile actions, such as a cruel and oppressive dictator, a mass murderer, a Satanic cult leader, or some similarly very disagreeable person who engages in wanton and heinous actions. Therefore these people and the acts they commit are both referred to as being evil in common usage. While this may all be true, if that common view adequately defined the subject it would not be covered in this book; but that view of evil is too narrow to align with God's view. The Bible defines evil as being much more complex, inclusive and pervasive than common usage would suggest. So how does the Bible define "evil"?

Since evil is a complex subject, let's begin with an overview. Evil is mentioned in over 400 Bible verses, so it is an important subject area to understand. As a starting point to enable understanding the issue, evil at its core is about opposition to God and His plan. There are two vantage points in life, and this split defines one side as evil and the other as true good. On the true good side is God and His plan, including those who are aligned with God and His plan. Everything else is opposed to God and His plan and is considered evil, and this is Satan's Cosmic System and those aligned with it. This is the divide between good and evil, and it generally defines evil as being opposed to God and His plan. Although believers are in God's overall plan since they have salvation, they can still cross over and support aspects of the evil plan of Satan.

At a more detailed level evil is about causing "unjustified harm" to another. Then defining the applicable forms of harm becomes the hard part. First and foremost, those who oppose God and His plan are committing harm against God. But you might ask, how can God be harmed? That is a good question which requires a detailed explanation and will soon be dealt with, but in general it is not actual harm but rather a specific type of offense against God resulting from rejection of Him by creatures. Then there is unjustified harm against people, and this can take many forms. Therefore during this chapter it is important to keep in mind the issue of unjustified harm as the core part of defining evil. To expand on the broad overview of evil, the Bible includes within the category of evil both thoughts and actions, therefore both can be evil. The Bible says there are inherently evil people. And God's view of those He considers to be inherently evil will surprise many since it includes most of the people of the world. So in God's view the majority of the people on earth are evil even though most of them would

never seriously harm anyone from the human viewpoint. And of course Satan and his fallen angels are evil. Even believers can think evil and perform evil deeds. And institutions, organizations and groups can be evil. These issues show that evil is a more complex subject than most would imagine, and likely raises more questions than it answers at this point. But we are making progress.

It helps to understand the subject of evil by describing those creatures, both angelic and human, the Bible calls evil. This will also lead us to the answer to the question regarding "harm" to God. Evil is mentioned very early in the Bible in Genesis when Adam and the woman were in the Garden of Eden, but evil began way before that, long before there were humans. As one might suspect, it began with Satan, so let's start with examining Satan since he is the originator of evil. Satan is defined as inherently and totally evil because Satan has set himself up in direct opposition to God, opposing all that God is, does, and stands for. That is part of the "harm" against God mentioned earlier, namely opposition to God. Therefore the word "harm" is used in relation to God to help humans understand how God views this issue, that He is very seriously displeased by direct opposition from His created beings. The fall of Satan at his original sin was an act of evil, and in fact it was the very first evil which ever occurred. It was evil because it was a revolt which opposed God, and this is the first clue in defining evil, that the most basic form of evil is opposition to God because it says that God is not God. That is "harm" against God, that His created creatures reject Him, say God does not exist, that God should not be sovereign over all creatures, should not be the only one worshiped, that He is lying about Himself, and other forms of rejection by created beings. In his original sin Satan said "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14) and he therefore said God is not my God, so I can set myself up as His equal. God sees that as "harm" in the sense we can understand that God does not lightly accept such arrogant affronts to His sovereignty. Therefore, when a created creature acts in opposition to God, that act is evil. And when one thinks and acts in a pattern in opposition to God, that person or creature is actually evil. We will shortly discuss how God views idolatry as evil. In fact, it is the number one thing referred to as being evil in the Bible. Satan is referred to as "the evil one" fourteen times in the New Testament including in 1 John 5:19 which says: "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." Satan and his fallen angels are called evil, and their control over the "whole world", which refers to all unbelievers, is focused on opposition to God. Satan gained rulership over the world when Adam fell and lost that title to Satan, then Satan established his rule inside a Cosmic System of evil. As the evil one Satan and his fallen

angels are inherently evil, and everything they do is called evil, since they are focused on opposing God in every way, and in all they do. Satan even does things which most people would call "good" as he seeks to advance his argument that he should not be put into the Lake of Fire, but because this "good" comes from Satan it is actually evil. Therefore there are also evil forms of good based on the sources and motivations.

As noted, Satan is evil, and his entire Cosmic System kingdom is evil. Satan invented evil, and it is his primary tool for opposing the plan of God. And all those who are part of Satan's Cosmic System are also evil, whether they are active or passive participants. All unbelievers are in this category as being in Satan's kingdom, therefore all unbelievers are called evil by the Bible because they reject God's salvation, so they are by default on the side of Satan, whether they actively seek to be or not. There are only two choices, and everyone makes their choice if only by lack of making a choice. 2 Thessalonians 3:1 says: "pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. 2 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith." In fact, God considers all unbelievers to be inherently evil, even the nicest ones, since they are not covered by salvation and the righteousness from Christ it provides. This is where the subject becomes tougher for many to understand, that all unbelievers are considered inherently evil, even the nicest, sweetest, most giving and most sincere ones. However, rejection of salvation is calling God a liar, which is evil opposition to God, and by their rejection of salvation unbelievers are saying that the Bible is a lie, and that Jesus Christ is not the Savior. Therefore unbelievers are committing harm against God and His Word by rejecting both, so they remain part of Satan's Cosmic System kingdom which is opposed to God. They are considered to be inherently evil since they are part of the kingdom of the evil one Satan, regardless of their actual deeds. We can see that evil is indeed far more inclusive and pervasive than most would think since the majority of people and one third of all angels are inherently evil in the sight of God.

Genesis 8:21 says "every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood." This is because every person is born in need of salvation, and under the control of the sinful nature. Until salvation occurs no person is covered by the righteousness of Christ, and is therefore not capable of pleasing God in any way. Every person is opposed to God and part of Satan's evil Cosmic System unless they accept God's plan. This makes God's love toward such people even more amazing, given how He views them. It is

salvation through faith in Christ as Savior which transforms the person from being inherently evil to a status of being acceptable to God. And it is not the works of man, but the grace of God which enables this salvation through Jesus Christ the only Savior. Colossians 1:21 says: “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” Even though believers remain sinners, they cease to be inherently evil at the point of salvation because they claim the righteousness of Christ as their own. Believers are still capable of committing evil acts, and can revert to being an evil person, but they are no longer inherently evil. If they are to become evil they must choose evil, but every unbeliever has already chosen evil by rejecting God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

Adam and Eve chose evil when they sinned in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2:9 says “The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Genesis 2:17 adds “but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” Genesis 3:5 quotes what Satan said to the woman when tempting her: “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” After the man and woman sinned God is quoted in Genesis 3:22 “And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” These passages show how pervasive the concept of evil is in human history, and how man gravitated to it from the very beginning in defiance of God's will.

But what does it mean Adam and Eve understood good and evil after eating the forbidden fruit? Creatures invented evil, first Satan, and then Adam and Eve created it for mankind. We see that the first sin by Satan was the first act of evil since it was a revolt against God. So also the first sin by mankind led the previously righteous man and woman to not only understand evil but also become embroiled in an act of evil, which was rebellion against God, a form of "harm" against God. Therefore the first sins by both angels and man were also acts of evil. The man and woman had not known sin or evil before they sinned, but they learned about both at the same time. When the Bible says they now knew "good and evil" it means they had gained a sinful nature. This was a loss of status which also

took them into a condition of being evil since they were now opposed to God, having taken the side of Satan even though it was by deceit on Satan's part, at least for the woman. Romans 6:12 says "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires." The word "sin" here is the sinful nature ruling the soul. They were the first people to have fallen from perfection into a status of being unacceptable to God, therefore unsaved. In this condition of sin mixed with evil they were hopeless to find a solution on their own. But God provided a way of salvation, and the two believed and were saved. But they did not lose their knowledge of evil since it was now part of the sinful nature they acquired at the point of their fall. And that sinful nature, and the associated knowledge of evil, have been passed down to every human since that time with one exception, namely, Jesus Christ.

As we see from the discussion about unbelievers being inherently evil, their actions may not appear to be evil in the sense we normally might define it. But that is because we mis-define evil and apply it to those we view as particularly bad, and most unbelievers do not generally appear to be evil on the surface. After all, it is obvious that many unbelievers do a lot of nice, decent, and honorable things. Most unbelievers do not commit acts commonly viewed as being evil any more than some believers. But that does not change the fact that unbelievers have chosen Satan's side either passively or actively. They reject God's offer of salvation, therefore they are calling God a liar. That is harm against God. Unbelievers cannot please God in any way, no matter what they do, unless it is believing in Jesus Christ as Savior. They are unacceptable to God in every way and are inherently evil since they are aligned with Satan's side. And there are only two sides, God's side and Satan's side. One is good, and the other is evil.

Looking at the issue of evil from a historical perspective through the lens of the nation Israel, one of the most persistent themes about evil in the Bible is that idolatry is evil. God considers idolatry to be evil since it is a personal attack on and affront to Him, essentially saying that God is not the true God, but rather someone or something else is. In the Old Testament the thing most commonly referred to as being evil was idolatry. This is the most drastic form of humans saying God is not God. The history of Israel was generally one of short periods of obeying and pleasing God mixed with much longer periods of abysmal failure. During these periods of failure Israel generally turned to idolatry. The kings of Israel who promoted such idolatry were said to have "done evil in the sight of the Lord". Most of the

kings of Israel ended up in this category and were called evil in the Bible for allowing or enabling idolatry. The entire Old Testament is full of references to idolatry being evil, such as Deuteronomy 4:25, 13:11, 17:2, etc, etc. God views idolatry as evil and therefore harmful, which is why it was one of the Ten Commandments. Therefore any king of Israel who allowed idolatry to exist in Israel was said to have done evil in the eyes of the Lord. There are close to a hundred verses in the Old Testament which refer to idolatry as an evil. It has always been Satan's approach that God should not be the one worshiped, but rather Satan believes he should be worshiped. That makes idolatry the single most fundamental form of evil because it is a clear statement by Satan and his followers that the true God is not God at all. There are many other serious affronts to God, but they are all generally wrapped up into giving Satan and his Cosmic System more respect than God, whether by deliberate acts or by passive refusal to accept God's existence or authority. And simply believing God exists is not enough. Satan believes God exists, and he is inherently evil.

So we see that Satan and all fallen angels are inherently evil, and since unbelievers are on Satan's side whether they know it or not, they too are inherently evil. Only salvation changes that. After salvation the believer still has a sinful nature passed down from Adam but can partially overcome it, with various degrees of success. But regardless of success against sin, believers are no longer inherently evil after salvation. But believers can still think and act in evil ways and/or do evil things when they align with Satan's side in opposition to God. The degree to which this happens in a believer's life runs the gamut from rarely to regularly. But doing evil does not cause loss of salvation, since salvation is by a single act of faith in Christ, not by being "good" or by avoiding evil. Believers can engage in evil, whether to oppose God and His plan directly or indirectly. Lust often leads to evil as 2 Timothy 2:22 says: "Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." 1 Timothy 6:10 says: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." The lust for money can lead to doing evil to gain it, often in a way which does significant harm to others to whom it belongs. Any type of scheme which tries to do harm to others by taking what is rightfully theirs is an evil scheme and results in an evil act. Bringing harm against God's believers is considered evil. When someone puts in place a scheme to do harm to a believer, that is an act of evil since it opposes a member of God's plan, and therefore by extension opposes God. Evil actions are

usually a pattern involving lust and scheming, not normally an isolated sin. People who live by their lusts are called evil, since evil thinking becomes a pattern of evil action which harms others.

As already noted, the Bible distinguishes between sin and evil. Sins are not always evil, but acts of evil are sin. And some acts of sin can pave the way for doing evil. But simply defining more heinous sins as being evil is not enough. For personal sins to be evil they must oppose God's plan or members of His plan, or oppose the orderly society God has put into place for humans to live under. Sins which are disruptive to an orderly society include being a false witness in court against another, scheming against people to defraud or defame them, slander, persecution, stealing, murder or any type of violence against innocent people since such things cause innocent people harm. Adultery also causes harm to an innocent spouse, so it is called evil. In contrast, fornication (two unmarried people) is not called evil even though it is a similar type of sin, since it does not harm an innocent third party. So we see that evil in relation to other people is generally scheming to commit harm, and also acting on that scheming. Both the scheme and the act are called evil. Lusting to commit acts which would harm others is also called evil. So the lusting, the scheming and the action are each separately evil since they are a pattern of planning to cause harm to innocent people, and then acting on that plan. The Ten Commandments cover many of the issues cited above, and Israel was specifically warned to avoid those ten since they could tear apart the fabric of a nation, especially one prone to idolatry such as ancient Israel. The Ten Commandments are not a list of the worst sins, but rather a list of the evil sins which would be most destructive to the nation Israel under the direct rule of God (theocracy).

Looking at the issue from another viewpoint, Jesus told the self-righteous Pharisees of His day that they were evil. These were men who strictly obeyed the Mosaic Law, so He was not accusing them of immorality. Rather, Jesus was accusing them of taking a stand against Him as God's representative on earth. Matthew 12:33 says: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. 35 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." The Pharisees were viewed as the most moral of people but were told by Jesus they were evil and what they said was evil. This is because the Pharisees lived their lives based on lust for power and approval of the masses, and tried to gain favor with God based on their own idea of goodness. But they were embroiled in Satan's plan and in his evil Cosmic System. They were opposing God's plan by opposing the Messiah, so by definition

they were evil. Their evil blinded them to the fact that they personally witnessed the promised Messiah, and yet rejected Him and asked the Romans to crucify Him.

There are also evil institutions, not just creatures. Nations can be evil. Some of them oppose God by suppressing the gospel of salvation, and others use their power to consistently harm the innocent as a pattern of action. There are many evil nations, and for different reasons. Some wage war to take what belongs to other nations and groups of people. Some wrongly take away the freedom of innocent people inside the nation, or persecute certain segments of the population, including Jews throughout history. Others sponsor or support terrorism, which is intended to deny freedom and impose an alternate system of acting and thinking. Some impose evil institutions by force, such as socialism which takes by force what belongs to some and gives it to others. Laws can be evil, especially those which attempt to suppress freedom to worship and evangelize. All evil nations have one thing in common, they suppress freedom and take away the basic human rights God has put in place which allow each person to make a choice for God's plan of salvation and spiritual growth. And since at its very core evil opposes God and His plan, and Satan's plan is only evil, evil intends to prevent humans from having the freedom to make choices for or against God. Those nations which take away freedoms in general and harm the innocent are suppressing God's system of individual liberty which allows people to live out their lives and make a free will choice about salvation, worship of God, and living the spiritual life God has for each believer. Therefore, nations which limit individual freedom and hinder the rights of people to make choices for or against God and His plan are evil. When governments take away the rights of individuals to freely choose how to please God, such as who should be the recipients of their generosity and giving, forcing people to approve of immoral behavior, forcing anti-Biblical behaviors on individuals, and such are all examples of evil. This makes dictators, socialism, government controlled religion, intrusion into privacy by government, and many other freedom-limiting actions evil. God's system of divine laws diffuses power among numerous nations in order to limit Satan's ability to control humans.

Other institutions can also be evil, such as religions which reject the Bible and therefore claim the God of the Bible is not the true God. Organizations which seek to tear down legitimate authority and societal structures established in accordance with divine laws are evil since they oppose a stable society ordained by God where all can make free choices for or against God. Many different types of

institutions, organizations and groups can become evil when they promote agendas which oppose God, His plan, or His divine laws in one form or another. It does not take much of an imagination to see that the world is full of evil nations, institutions, organizations, groups, and other collections of people who oppose God and/or His believers in some way. Evil is not always glaring, but is often subtle. This should not be surprising since Satan rules this world, and he and his plan are both pure evil. The history of mankind is one of mostly evil nations with very occasional exceptions. But even within those exceptions evil will still find its way into the fabric of society to some degree. And evil never gives up trying to break down the divine order which God has put in place to enable freedom to choose for or against God and His plan.

So the definition of evil becomes somewhat more clear, namely that evil is first and foremost opposition to God, to God's plan, to those in God's plan, and/or opposition to the system of divine laws and individual liberty God has put in place by which each person can make a choice for or against God. Secondly, evil is harm planned and committed against others. When evil is viewed in light of these concepts, it can be seen that evil is something far more pervasive, pernicious, and common than most would think. In fact, evil is what the world runs on. This is because Satan is inherently evil, his Cosmic System plan is inherently evil, and as a result he bases his world rulership on evil. And since every unbeliever is inside Satan's plan, whether by direct choice or by failure to make a choice, they are inherently evil in God's eyes. It is therefore harder to avoid people and entities which are evil than commonly thought. Oddly, once we understand the subject of evil we need a stronger word than "evil" to describe those actions which are truly heinous such as mass murder and the people who commit such heinous acts.

The Bible also distinguishes between good and good. Satan incorporates "good" into his Cosmic System, which is his evil system set up in opposition to God. Therefore "good" inside Satan's system is not good to God, but rather it is evil when it comes from Satan or any source which is on Satan's side. And since Satan does many things which people consider to be good deeds, that is complicating. Satan and fallen angels can accomplish no true "good" as God defines it, but they can accomplish plenty of pseudo good, which the world often sees as just plain "good". These issues will be covered in the "Satan's Strategy" chapter so will not be repeated here, but in summary pseudo good is what Satan uses to oppose God while appearing to offer good to mankind, often by cleaning up Satan's world by

human powered self improvement. It is not easy to distinguish true good from pseudo good which is evil, as Hebrews 5:14 says: "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Only the truly mature believer who understands God's Word in detail can consistently distinguish between good and evil in a manner which lines up with God's thinking on the subject. The evil form of good from Satan is not an oxymoron since Satan and his forces only use pseudo good in order to accomplish evil and to further his evil plans in opposition to God. Since Satan does some things considered to be good to advance his evil plans, everything Satan does is always entirely evil. Every part of Satan's Cosmic System is therefore evil, even the pseudo good in it, since it is done to advance the cause of evil.

Therefore there are two types of good and one type of evil. The only true good is associated with and sanctioned by God. Every other "good" is pseudo good, since it is not from God. Pseudo good is that which appears to be good, but in fact is opposed to God and His plan. And all evil is apart from God, since there is no evil in God (James 1:13). True "good" is what is done within God's plan, and includes nothing in Satan's plan. All which is done within Satan's plan is evil, even if the world views it as good, which is often the case. And each person is either in God's plan because they have believed in Jesus Christ, or they are in Satan's plan, which is only evil. But a person does not need to act in an evil manner to be inherently evil. Again we see why this is such a difficult concept, because "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (Samuel 16:7) But people embroiled in evil do not see themselves as evil, otherwise they would not be able to accept themselves as being good, which most evil people indeed believe they are good. This is where the mixture of evil with an evil form of good occurs. For example, this is where the concept of the end justifying the means comes into play. Even if the means is wrong, the outcome is viewed as good and therefore justifies the wrong actions used. True good from God's viewpoint (the only correct one) does not mix evil with good, since the outcome of the mixture is always evil. Satan seeks to confuse his forms of good with what the Word of God says is true good. Satan wants his human minions on earth to do many forms of Cosmic System good, since that distracts them from seeking God. The theory becomes that if man can improve himself, then he does not need God. If man can improve his environment, then who needs God's plan for the Millennial Kingdom? Thus Satan's forms of good become an alternate religion designed to thwart God's plan.

In conclusion we see that evil at its core is opposition to God and His plan, including opposition to those who are in His plan. Satan is evil, and his entire kingdom is evil. And all those who submit to and support his Cosmic System are also evil, whether they are active or passive participants. Therefore Satan and all unbelievers are called inherently evil by the Bible. Unbelievers have no relationship with God, so they have by definition rejected God and His plan, and therefore are part of Satan's plan. They are on Satan's side simply because they are not on God's side. There are only two choices, and everyone makes their choice if only by lack of making a choice. Until salvation occurs no person is capable of pleasing God in any way, and therefore they are considered evil unless they accept God's plan. It is salvation through faith in Christ as Savior which transforms the person from being inherently evil to a status of being acceptable to God. Evil is also opposition to those in God's plan, since that is a type of opposition to God. And harming the innocent is evil since it interferes with the freedom of that individual to choose for or against God, interfering with the salvation and spiritual growth process God has established. Therefore, evil is not as limited as most would imagine, but rather is one of the most pervasive forces in history, driving untold misery and human suffering.

Satan's Strategy

Most people assume Satan's strategy is simply to create all the sin, hardship and pain on earth that he can. But it is far more complicated than that. Satan's actual strategy is completely focused on opposing God in order to keep himself out of the Lake of Fire, a sentence which was handed down from God long before man was created, and that is all he cares about. Everything else is merely a means to try to achieve that outcome. Satan is now in an appeal stage for his sentence since he questioned how God could do such a horrible thing as condemn creatures He created to eternal punishment, and he accused God of being unfair, unloving, and a liar. A harsh accusation and absolutely false, but God decided in His infinite grace to grant Satan an appeal trial, therefore Satan's sentence is being delayed during human history to allow him to make his case. The creation of mankind became a large part of this appeal trial, and Satan's plan is now using mankind to try to stay out of the Lake of Fire.

Since Satan's focus is on the single goal of proving why he and his fallen angels should not be sent to the Lake of Fire, he will do anything to achieve that goal. That is certainly where evil and chaos come into play, but these are not the main part of Satan's plan. The main part of his plan has a broader goal of showing that God is both unfair and unloving toward humans and that God has also lied about the prophecies of the Bible, which is God's Word. Satan figures that if he can prove God is unfair, unloving or a liar then God would be no better than Satan. It is a blasphemous plan, certainly. But if Satan could actually prove any of these assertions he would escape his sentence to the Lake of Fire, but then, God would not be God, so the assertions are impossible to prove. But it is all Satan has to work with so he never gives up trying. The consequences of failure are what drive Satan to extreme measures, and he does not care who gets hurt in the process.

It is helpful to remember that Satan is a created creature. He does not have foreknowledge of future events except as revealed in the Bible. So he is a student of the Bible as a source of "intelligence" about what he must do to try to thwart God's Plan. He cannot read minds. He can only be in one place at any given time. His power and operations are limited by God, and he must comply with God's rules or he will be imprisoned. He is not as physically powerful as the elect archangel Michael. He is a super-genius but is not omniscient, only very smart; and he has been around a long time so he knows a

lot. But he has the exact same soul design as any human, just in a vastly superior body. He is extremely arrogant, vain, a total liar and filled with hatred, all of which blind him to reality and cause him to make very bad decisions. This is merely to point out that Satan must play by certain rules and that he does not have anything near the mental or physical capabilities of God. If Satan is going to influence history and people, he must do so by convincing people to join his side, not by physical force or cosmic powers. When a physical matter does occur such as demon possession (rarely) it is a result of first giving in to Satan's persuasive influence. Given all that he has found very effective ways to influence and persuade people by playing to the basest instincts of mankind; and when human history ends most people who ever lived will have fallen into Satan's plan by their own bad choices. So we must give him his due, that given the constraints God has placed on him, and the fact that he is merely a created creature, Satan is very effective at influencing massive groups of people to join his evil cause. And that cause is entirely self-serving, not a matter of trying to accomplish anything useful or helpful for the people he ensnares.

We will begin with a summary of Satan's strategy, and then fill in the details. This helps put the overall issue into perspective so we do not get lost in the details.

Satan's plan unfolds in stages and focuses on different issues during different periods of time. His primary focus and most ambitious plans were aimed at the promised Messiah Jesus Christ. Satan first tried to prevent His arrival, then tried to kill Him or stop Him from providing salvation during His First Advent. Once those had failed, Satan's focus changed to proving God to be a liar by trying to prevent Biblical prophecies from being fulfilled as God has promised. Satan reasons that if any prophesy of the Bible is not fulfilled, then God has lied, and God would be as imperfect as Satan. Another focus is to show that Satan can provide mankind with the things God has promised, and sooner, and also without all the restrictions God imposes. A primary part of this portion of the plan is to convince as many people as possible to join with him and reject God's plan for salvation. This may only look like a "misery likes company" approach, but he figures it adds to his argument if more people choose him than choose for God, showing he is more popular than God, which in essence is a popularity contest with God. During the Church Age Satan also opposes believers as he has during all Ages, but the Holy Spirit puts additional limits on that opposition against Church Age believers. And since Satan rules this world he is also trying to provide a perfect environment on earth, which God has promised as part of

the Millennial Kingdom under Jesus Christ. But if Satan could do that first, he believes it would show him to be better than God in man's view since Satan would appear to treat people better than God, giving them a Satan-produced millennium apart from God so that man would reject God's true Millennial Kingdom. This perfect environment approach is a current primary focus. Then near the end of Satan's appeal trial during the Tribulation Satan's only remaining game plan is chaos, evil, and trying to kill all people on the earth and especially all Jews since they are part of Biblical prophecy for the Millennial Kingdom. Satan believes that given enough chaos anything might happen. That is where the Tribulation comes into play. In all of these approaches Satan's focus is to prove God unfair, unloving or a liar so that he just might slip out of his sentence to the Lake of Fire. As we see, Satan's plan is multi-faceted and changes to meet the various Ages of human history. We also see how Satan not only focuses on doing evil things, but is also highly focused on doing "good" as he defines it to show he is as good or better than God. He believes that if he can show himself to be good in the eyes of mankind then he will win his appeal trial and avoid the Lake of Fire. If all of this sounds like the plan will likely fail, that is correct. But Satan continues to try anything and everything he can, hoping something just might work. Satan has memorized the Bible, and he knows how it all will end. But he wants to write a new final chapter which ends "...and Satan and his fallen angels lived happily ever after." Severely delusional.

That is the overview of Satan's plan, and we will fill in the details as we proceed. But first, how did things get to this point anyway?

Satan was the most favored angel in Heaven for a very long time, maybe thousands or possibly even millions of years. He was created by God to be the most powerful, best looking, smartest, most personable angel of all. Therefore the view most have of Satan as an ugly red beast is untrue. He was very close to God and had the best of everything available to him. Ezekiel 28:12 says of Satan: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'You [Satan] were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: 14 You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.'"

As the number one angel in heaven Satan had the best of everything. At some point he became arrogant and desired to have more authority than God allowed, so he led a revolt against God, recruiting many angels to follow him. Satan's original coup attempt occurred long before the creation of man when he revolted against God and declared "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars [angels] of God...I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). Satan's thinking was that he could set himself up as ruler of a group of angels living apart from God's authority, essentially a group under the rule of Satan and entirely apart from God. Satan looked at God and wanted to be like Him. He lusted for God's power. He did not think he could be God, just be like Him in the sense that Satan wanted to be a separate ruler adored by his own group of followers, and not be under God's authority. This is why Satan fell. It was a lust for power. After all, Satan was the smartest, most powerful, best looking angel God had created, so he reasoned he was very special and capable of doing what God did. He saw the authority and power of God and wanted it for himself, which induced an arrogance leading to revolution against God. Pride precedes the fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

Ezekiel 28:15 also covers the fall of Satan due to arrogance:

"You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. 16 Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. 17 Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor."

Satan and the other fallen angels waged war in heaven against God and His elect angels, and of course Satan's side lost. A trial occurred, and Satan and all fallen angels were judged guilty and sentenced to the Lake of Fire before mankind ever existed. We can surmise from what the Bible says about associated issues that Satan objected to his punishment by saying an eternity in the Lake of Fire was unfair, and not what a loving God would do. As a result God allowed an appeal trial, and this is where mankind entered the picture. God created one man and one woman, with souls exactly like angels' souls but in much lower bodies, and placed them on earth to start the process to resolve the issues of God's perfect fairness and perfect love. During human history mankind is on earth to prove that God is

a fair and loving God, and that Satan's sentence to the Lake of Fire is justified and consistent with God's perfect character. Therefore, Satan's future is tied to the human race, so all his plans are linked to human history. His plan has had several components to this point, some are ongoing, and some are yet future. And contrary to popular belief, Satan has never been to Hell, and he certainly does not rule over it. Hell (Torments) is a temporary holding cell for human unbelievers until they are judged at the end of history and it is not meant to house angels. The Lake of Fire will replace Hell, and that is the destination of Satan and his angels as well as all human unbelievers. This sentence will be carried out for both groups after human history has ended. This shows how human history is tied directly to what is known as the "angelic conflict."

We see that Satan's fall resulted in a very long-running angelic conflict in which mankind plays a significant role, and it continues even now although Satan has already been judged guilty and sentenced to the Lake of Fire. In fact, this angelic conflict is why man was created. Satan's revolt against God resulted in 1/3 of all angels choosing to join with Satan, while 2/3 remained loyal to God. This divided angels into elect and fallen angels. Once this separation of elect and fallen angels occurred, each group was on a separate path toward eternity. With this background of the angelic conflict in mind, we will now begin to discuss how Satan's plan affects earth and the human race. First of all, Satan is the legitimate ruler of the world despite stealing it. He stole it from Adam at the time of the fall of man in the Garden when Adam was the ruler. God put Adam in charge, but Adam lost the rulership to Satan when he sinned. In his role as ruler of the world, Satan is a despot and generally incompetent, more so than most understand. He is a super-genius, but his arrogance blinds him into making very bad decisions. He opposes all of God's desires for mankind to have individual freedom, engage in enlightened self interest, and have the freedom to choose between God's plan and Satan's plan. In contrast, Satan wants to force mankind to accept his plan over God's plan and submit to him, rather than to freely choose God. Satan's plan is one of force and subjugation of mankind. Satan does not like mankind, and does not care what happens to anyone unless they can help further his evil plan. He only cares about staying out of the Lake of Fire, and he is determined to use mankind to achieve this goal. Of course, it is all foolishness on Satan's part and certain to end up as God has already ordered, but God is allowing Satan every opportunity to prove his point. This is where mankind suffers in the process at the hands of Satan's plan. But God gives each one involved the choice to chose a side, God's side or Satan's side. Those are the only two options.

God established ground-rules for the appeal trial, so Satan must remain within those rules just like any court of law requires proper procedure. God divided the appeal trial after the Garden of Eden into stages of history, therefore a discussion about how God divided human history into periods of time, referred to as Ages in the Bible, helps us understand why and how Satan's plans have changed in relation to them. A brief review of Ages is in order to see how Satan's plan changes to line up with the various Ages of time. God has a multi-faceted plan for human history which must play out in stages. Those stages each have different requirements and rules (covenants) necessitating changes in God's direction to man during the various Ages of time, which also requires Satan to change his own plans. God has divided human history into the following Ages:

- 1) Age of the Patriarchs: from Adam until Moses
- 2) Age of Israel Part I: from Moses to the Cross, then an interruption inserts the Church Age
- 3) Age of the Church: from the Cross until the Rapture (Resurrection of the Church)
- 4) Age of Israel Part II: resumes and finishes during the seven year Tribulation
- 5) Millennium Kingdom: the 1000 year reign of Christ completes human history.

Satan's plan changes to oppose God during each Age as he seeks to find a way to prove God unfair, unloving or a liar. Prior to the start of the Ages of time Adam was given rulership over the earth, and his throne room was the Garden of Eden. When man eventually sinned, following a pattern similar to Satan's sin, God provided salvation through the future Messiah who would eventually be Jesus Christ, proving God's love and fairness to unworthy mankind. This came as a shock to Satan who thought he had just won his appeal trial by tempting the humans into sin. Now God had thrown him a curve ball. Mankind was allowed to expand in numbers to provide a broader test to further disprove Satan's assertions about God being unfair and unloving, so Satan revised his strategy. One change in Satan's favor was that he had gained rulership of the world, since Adam had lost that rulership by sinning. After being thrown out of the Garden, mankind's new role for each one who would be born was to choose for or against God. Each person was required to make a simple choice. They could use their free will to accept the gracious gift of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ the Savior, or they could reject it and remain in Satan's realm. God's salvation offer showed Satan that God is not only perfect righteousness and justice, but also perfect love and completely fair. These combined traits can

legitimately put Satan and all fallen angels into the Lake of Fire as punishment due to the finality of their rejection of God. Now we will take a look at the various sub-plans in Satan's overall plan as he tries desperately to avoid his certain doom.

Satan's appeal trial started the day man was created. Satan's first plan was to tempt the man and woman to disobey God, which was to sin and therefore "fall" just as Satan had. God established only one way man could disobey Him and sin, which was to eat the fruit of one prohibited tree. The tree was a simple yes/no daily test for the man and woman. And they were created with both a soul and human spirit, but with no sinful nature, therefore any temptation to sin would only come from outside of them. Satan looked at the situation and surmised that if he was able to tempt the two humans to sin, he would win the appeal trial and his sentence would be canceled. Unknown to Satan, God had a surprise in store since God knew Satan could eventually tempt the humans well enough to induce them to sin by eating from the one forbidden tree. But Satan did not know about God's salvation counter move. Satan lied to the woman and deceived her into eating from the prohibited tree. Satan told her in Genesis 3:3 "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?...⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Satan tempted the woman to eat, lying to her about spiritual death, and playing to her own desire for power to be like the Most High God, mirroring Satan's fall. And when Adam saw what she had done, he saw no choice except to join her and face the consequences together. When they had both sinned, Satan rejoiced and thought he had won his appeal. Then God offered the sinful humans a way of salvation, which they both accepted. That changed everything. The rules from then on were to enable mankind to proliferate, and each person born after that time would be required to make choices for or against God, and would either join God's side or Satan's side. That is the simple summary of human history, which is each person who is born must make choices. Each must choose to accept or reject salvation, then those who choose to accept salvation must choose to live the spiritual life God requires or reject God's plan for their life.

After God offered salvation to fallen mankind Satan's strategy changed to focus on opposing God on the issues of salvation and also to oppose those who would accept salvation, seeking to counter any and all choices made by humans in favor of God. Since God had promised a Messiah to provide salvation to mankind, Satan's new plan was to prevent the Messiah from completing the mission of reconciling

man to God. Therefore Satan became highly focused on shutting down the Messiah. Satan reasoned that if the Messiah were prevented from fulfilling His mission, God would be a liar and no better than Satan. Then mankind could only turn to Satan for help. That would make the appeal trial a draw, and Satan and his angels would not be put into the Lake of Fire.

Satan's strategy to thwart the Messiah took several forms, some quite unusual. They included attempts to kill off all mankind, corrupt the lineage of mankind, to kill the Jews since the Messiah would come from Israel, to kill the Messiah once revealed, to disqualify the Messiah, and to get the Messiah Himself to sin and fall. Let's take a look at each of these.

We know from the Bible that some angels did not follow God's defined rules for the angelic conflict and were imprisoned in several places including the Abyss, under the Euphrates River, and in Tartarus, and they remain there at this time. 1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits [fallen angels]— 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built." We see that some of the fallen angels violated God's rules for the appeal trial of Satan, and were imprisoned for it. This was what happened in Satan's first ploy to corrupt the lineage of the Messiah and prevent Him from being born a true human. His ingenious and outrageous plan is outlined in Genesis chapter 6, and involves fallen angels fathering children with human women. As outlandish as this may seem, the plan nearly succeeded in corrupting the humanity of the world. At one point, only eight humans remained true humanity, namely Noah, his wife, and their three sons and wives. The rest of the people on earth were half human, half angel. This is possible since the souls of man and angels are exactly the same. And the angels were capable of sex, so male fallen angels were capable of fathering children with human women. Genesis 6:2 says: "the sons of God [fallen angels] saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. 4 The Nephilim [half angel, half human] were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God [fallen angels] went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown." This is certainly one of most amazing deep mysteries of the Bible, that fallen angels tried to corrupt the lineage of the Messiah by having children by human women, and those children were essentially the ancient heroes we had thought were merely legends and myths, people

like Hercules, Achilles, Ajax and others. These "Nephilim" were renowned for great feats of strength and superhuman achievements in sports such as in the ancient Olympics when they set records which have never been broken. This was the reason for the Great Flood and the ark. The Flood wiped out all half human/half angel "Nephilim" creatures and allowed mankind to continue as truly human, and protected the human lineage of the Messiah who needed to be fully human to pay for the sins of humanity.

So that was an ingenious and outrageous plan. Very bold and also very stupid. The fallen angels who fathered these Nephilim children went to prison for violating God's rules for the angelic conflict. The fallen angels involved are still there, under the earth, in prison. All the Nephilim were wiped out by the Great Flood, which was the reason God sent that flood, and only eight people were saved who were all true humans and also believers. As the passage above says, after the cross Jesus went to tell those fallen angels they had failed, and to inform them that He had provided salvation despite their evil efforts to corrupt humanity. This is also why the Apostle's Creed says Jesus "descended into Hell", meaning He went to where these fallen angels were imprisoned in a part of Hades/Hell apart from the human unbelievers and delivered His message to them, that they had utterly failed. And since they had failed, they had been in prison for several thousand years for nothing.

After this scheme failed, Satan turned to countering individuals who were faithful to God, such as Job. Satan asked to be allowed to severely test Job, and God allowed it as long as Job was not killed in the process. Job had some successes and failures during the rigorous testing by Satan, but in the final analysis Job proved that a person who stuck with God's plan despite intense suffering and unfair adversity would be taken care of by God. And Job ended up better off than when he started. So Satan decided there were other options he should pursue instead.

Satan learns from history as it unfolds since he is only a creature and therefore cannot foretell the future. So when he saw God forming a group of humans called the Jews as His own people to spread the message of salvation and to keep the scriptures, Satan became intensely focused on destroying them. The history of the Jews is one of Satan bringing intense pressure on the Jews to distract them from God's plan, and to generally seek to destroy them. The developing Scriptures, which Satan has carefully read and memorized, showed that the Messiah would come from among the Jews. This became the focus of Satan's plan, namely to wipe out the Jews and prevent the Messiah from being

born. And it is interesting to note that Satan believes the Bible. For him it is his intelligence system to try to thwart God's plan. Satan has engaged in numerous attempts to eliminate the Jews, including Egyptian slavery, ancient regimes which conquered the Jews such as Assyria and Babylon, and numerous anti-semitic nations throughout history. All have failed. But Satan is not done with this plan. His best efforts are yet to come, and it will be called the Great Tribulation.

Satan, being a great student of the Bible, knew the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and live during the time announced in Daniel chapter 7, which Daniel revealed would be 483 years after the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem starting in 445 BC. Satan knew He was coming, and tried to head Him off. He used Herod the ruler of Judea who ordered all Jewish babies under age two to be killed when Jesus was under two years old. But Jesus had been taken to Egypt to live until the danger passed. The Wise Men who met with Herod gave the family of Jesus gold, which enabled them to live out their time in Egypt. The Wise Men were called such because they understood Daniel chapter 7 and other Bible prophecies, and knew when the Messiah was coming and that He would be born in Bethlehem. Many think the Wise Men were three stargazer/astrologers who just happened to follow a shiny object. They were wise because they understood the Word of God. They knew when Jesus was to be born, and where, so they looked for a sign from God to proceed to where He was located, and it was provided to them. God's standard for wisdom is what the Bible says, and the Bible calls them wise because they knew the prophecies from the book of Daniel.

Once the Messiah was born and survived the initial attempts to kill Him, Satan focused on keeping Him from fulfilling His mission to provide salvation. Once He was revealed by John the Baptist, Satan knew who He actually was, and then Jesus was tempted by Satan as described in Matthew 4:1-11:

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very

high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

We covered the details of the temptation of Jesus in a previous chapter, but the key here is that it was a part of the strategy of Satan to get Jesus to fall just as Satan and Adam and Eve had fallen, to show that Jesus would sin just as all others had done. This would have shown that if even the Messiah had fallen, then Satan should not be punished for doing the same thing. But Satan failed at his attempts to lure Jesus into sin, so he had to try to stop the Messiah in some other way.

Satan could not afford to give up. A looming eternity in the Lake of Fire refocused him to continue his efforts. He threw everything at Jesus he could muster. He had Jesus' friend John the Baptist beheaded. He focused on having every group and person reject Him that Satan could. He cajoled the Jews to reject Him as Messiah. Even a close disciple Judas betrayed Him, and Peter denied Him. Why would Jesus want to suffer for this bunch of ingrates? Satan pushed the “ingrates” issue to the maximum. But Jesus remained focused on His mission. It was not about humanity deserving anything, but rather about the Father having sent Him on a selfless mission of accomplishing salvation for undeserving and ungrateful humanity. He went to the cross and removed the sin issue, reconciling man to God. This put a stake in the heart of Satan. Satan’s plan was basically defeated once the cross occurred. But he still did not give up, and he will not ever give up until he is in the Lake of Fire.

Therefore Satan persevered. Since the Messiah accomplished the work of salvation, Satan’s options were greatly limited. Satan became more focused on preventing humans from accepting salvation, corrupting and distracting God's believers, trying to kill off the Jews, and generally trying to prevent God from fulfilling Bible prophecies. He also now attempts to copy what God has promised. Satan is the #1 copycat of all time, and is a master at it. His current copycats include trying to provide a perfect environment on earth before God can do it in the Millennium. And Satan figures that if God ever fails to fulfill one single Bible prophecy then He will have lied, and would be no better than Satan. According to the current Satanic strategy, Satan is trying to create a society with himself on the throne and all mankind worshiping him under an idealistic brotherhood of man, where humans practice a form

of self righteous morality as Satan defines the terms, although it is in fact an evil society. So Satan is highly focused on preventing God from fulfilling the remaining prophesies of the Old Testament, mainly about the Jews, but also about how the future will play out in the Tribulation and the Millennium. This is where Satan gets really ugly.

In his attempt to mimic God, Satan has a goal to create a peaceful perfect environment on earth and beat God's timing for the Millennium when there will be a true perfect environment on the earth under the rule of Jesus Christ. Satan is a complete copy-cat. He wants to rule earth during a pseudo-millennium where everyone does what Satan wants and everyone remains under his control. But man's sinful nature gets in the way of that goal. Oddly, Satan wants to eliminate war, since many future prophecies include "wars and rumors of wars". So also Satan would like to eliminate poverty and make everyone stop thinking about their need for God. Satan wants all people to practice humanly powered self improvement showing that God's power of the Holy Spirit is unnecessary. Satan even wants people to stop certain sins. In fact, Satan is self righteous about himself, and demands that from his underlings. But he does not see murder and constant lying as inconsistent, since for him any means is justified by the end he desires. Constant sinning combined with self righteousness are not incompatible to Satan. Satan tries to get humanity to clean up the earth and protect it in an attempt to institute a pseudo perfect environment on the earth. Satan wants mankind to think about a human powered millennium, not about God and God's plan. So Satan tries to deceive people into thinking he can create a new world order which is peaceful and has perfect environment, something most people would not expect from Satan. But Satan is crafty if nothing else, since he is unable to fulfill his promises, and his plan is primarily aimed at distracting both unbelievers and believers away from God's plan, and refocusing them on Satan's plan of human self improvement. Satan also uses socialism to put in place an economic utopia where everyone depends on his pseudo-generosity. Of course this is impossible, and some of those pesky humans continue to want freedom of choice and believe in God. So Satan is a lying, deceitful dictator who wants total control, and wants mankind to do as they are told. 2 Corinthians 11:14 says: "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

The angelic conflict is still ongoing, but the salvation work of Jesus Christ on the cross has sealed the fate of Satan and all fallen angels. Satan had tried desperately to prevent the cross. He wanted to show God to be a liar since God had promised man salvation through a Messiah. This would have proven Satan's claim that he should not be put into the Lake of Fire. Since the cross has occurred and salvation has been made available to man thus proving the fairness of God, Satan has lost the overall argument, and the rest of history is a mere formality. However the conflict will continue to play out until the end of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, when human history comes to an end and all creatures enter their final eternity. Satan will be shown to be a complete fraud who wanted to create a perfect environment on earth and at the same time trying to destroy all people and the earth. Proving for the final time that Satan is the father of lies. John 8:44 says: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

As mentioned, Satan's plan continues to be very focused on eliminating the Jews. The Jews figure prominently in many Bible prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled. If there were no Jews, the prophecies could not be fulfilled. So this is a recurring theme in history. Satan also knows a future Tribulation and Millennium will occur. Remember, he believes what the Bible says even though he wants to rewrite the ending. The Tribulation will be a time of untold suffering and misery on the earth due to Satan's fury and exasperation as he loses control and sees his end approaching, since he will be imprisoned after that time. Satan will continue to try to eliminate the Jews, but will also try to destroy the entire earth and all mankind, which is inconsistent with his other plans. Satan repeats his plans since he does not have many good ideas, so he will try to prevent future prophecy fulfillment by either eliminating the Jews or by destroying the earth. This will make the Tribulation very destructive. But God will protect His own believers, and the Jews will survive and turn to Him as believers in Christ in greater numbers as the blinders fall from their eyes during the Tribulation. In the meantime Satan's plan is to make the world "better" which to him includes eliminating the Jews who seem to make certain other people unhappy and angry. And since God has many future prophecies built around the Jews, Satan wants to eliminate the Jews to prevent fulfillment of those prophecies. If he could accomplish this, Satan would have mankind rewrite the future in a way which avoids God's prophecies from being fulfilled, making Satan the winner in his appeal trial. God would be shown to be a liar and

therefore no better than Satan. Of course God would not be God if that were possible, but Satan has very few options remaining to avoid the Lake of Fire. No one ever accused Satan of making good sense. But the Jews will continue to suffer disproportionately as a result of Satan's evil plans.

A very artful and excellent summary of Satan's strategy for mankind was written by Dr. L.S. Chafer in his multi-volume work called "Systematic Theology." Dr. Chafer wrote:

"Satan sets himself up as "the god of this world" in imitation of God the Father, as the "prince of the world" in imitation of God the Son, and as "the spirit that now energizeth in the children of disobedience" in imitation of God the Holy Spirit. But he is a very cheap and blasphemous imitation who personifies evil. He lied to the woman in the Garden of Eden when he tempted her to eat of the forbidden fruit by telling her: "Ye shall not surely die."

It is natural that Satan should suggest to humanity that by separation of humanity from God he could claim that authority over them and be worshiped by them.

The Satanic method for life prompts him to become a god by a process of a religious system of self-help; for there is a great field for religious exercise for the one who is attempting to make himself Godlike. Satan is striving, at any rate, to direct the lives of those who are under his power into a degree of self development that will be a substitute for the revealed purpose of God for men.

Satan's dominant purpose is not, as the popular impression supposes, one of attempting to be unlike God. Satan has explicitly asserted concerning himself, as recorded in Isaiah 14:14, that his transcendent objective is to be like the Most High. The deception of the counterfeit depends wholly upon its likeness to the real. Herein is revealed the reason for calling that a lie or deception which is externally so like the truth. Certainly there could be no greater pitfall for souls than a system which seems to be the truth of God, and yet robs its followers of any basis for a true hope, and it will be found that the most terrible condemnation of Scripture is uttered against such systems and their promoters.

The unregenerate masses of humanity are said to be deceived by Satan. Their delusion is tragic and pitiable. They are imposed upon by Satan's subterfuge, treachery, and fraud.

Next to the lie itself, the greatest delusion Satan imposes--is the supposition that only such things as society considers evil could originate with the devil--if, indeed, there be any devil to originate anything. It is not the reason of man, but the revelation of God, which points out that governments, morals, education, art, commercialism, vast enterprises and organizations, and much of religious activity are included in the cosmos diabolicus. That is, the system which Satan has constructed includes all the good which he can incorporate into it and be consistent in the thing he aims to accomplish. A serious question arises whether the presence of gross evil in the world is due to Satan's intention to have it so, or whether it indicates Satan's inability to execute all he has designed. The probability is great that Satan's ambition has led him to undertake more than any creature could ever administer. Revelation declares that the whole cosmos-system must be annihilated--not its evil alone, but all that is in it, both good and bad. God will incorporate nothing of Satan's failure into that Kingdom which He will set up in the earth."

Chafer, Lewis Sperry, Systematic Theology, Vol. 2, Angelology-Anthropology-Harmortiology.
Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947; pp. 99-102

When the end nears for Satan during the final stages of the Tribulation he will degenerate into what he really is, a liar, a hater, and a mass murderer. His only remaining plan will be destruction and chaos. He will try to kill all the Jews, as he has done for thousands of years. But he will lose control and his own angels will instead kill Satan's followers by the hundreds of millions. Satan will lash out in fury and revenge and be shown to be the evil fool he is. He will lose control, and his evil plans will come crashing down to earth in rubble.

Satan's legacy will be one of having fallen from grace, rejecting the best things God ever offered a creature, having lied and cheated his way through his existence, and having murdered billions of people. He will have deceived most of the humans who ever lived into either ignoring or outright rejecting God's grace plan in favor of his evil, miserable, and hopeless plan, resulting in their own eternal condemnation along with Satan himself. His appeal to God that he should not be put into the

Lake of Fire for all eternity will have failed miserably. He will still end up in the Lake of Fire, not ruling, but just another tortured soul in a lowly body equal to all the condemned humans he deceived. Forever.

So how did that attempt to rewrite the ending of the Bible work out, Satan?

Why Do Bad Things Happen?

Why do apparently innocent people suffer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why is there evil in the world? Why do children die so young from cancer and other diseases? Why doesn't God stop these things since He is omnipotent?

These questions are repeated over and over in various forms. Many horrible things happen to people we view as being good and innocent, and indeed many of them may be. Funerals include people asking how God could allow such terrible things to happen. Most say they have no answers, but there are answers. We may not definitively know the answer in each individual case, but the Bible explains why there is unfair suffering in the world, and the answers are different depending on the status of the individual.

We must start with two facts which shape the answers to these questions. First, God is perfect, and He has declared His desire that all people have salvation and blessings from Him. But a second and conflicting fact is that Satan rules the world, having stolen that rulership from Adam in the Garden of Eden when Satan lured the man and woman into sin. This second fact, that Satan rules the world, is the complicating issue regarding all of the questions about man's suffering and why God does not intervene in every case regarding the suffering of people we view as innocent. As a general principle God cannot make Satan appear more acceptable to people by reducing the suffering of the human race. The outcome would be far worse, since more people would end up in the Lake of Fire for eternity if God helped Satan clean up the mess he has made. God set up a perfect world for perfect people, but they rejected it, and all people since have suffered for the decisions of our original parents. Satan is a bad ruler, and as a result many people suffer needlessly. However, for those who are God's believers on the earth God takes care of His own inside Satan's world, even if that may not always be clear to the observers.

But who does God see as innocent?

God views the people of the world in several categories. The two main categories are believer vs. unbeliever. God only looks after those who have accepted salvation from Him through Jesus Christ, and therefore have become believers. These are God's children, and He treats them as His responsibility even though they live in Satan's world. The rest are unbelievers and are on their own, subject to the whims of chance and the unfair actions of others inside the mess which is Satan's dominion. Unbelievers have chosen Satan's Cosmic System, either by choice or by lack of making a choice for God. Many of these individual unbelievers may be humanly innocent of wrongdoing from the human standpoint, but that is not the issue since God has no obligation to help them because they have rejected Him. Although God has set in place rules for Satan and his fallen angels as world rulers, God does not protect unbelievers from the evil and unfair suffering of Satan's world, no matter how innocent they may seem to be otherwise. God is not in the business of cleaning up Satan's mess, which would simply make Satan appear more appealing to mankind. God wants all mankind to come to Him for salvation through Jesus Christ, and the key for unbelievers in suffering is to turn to God and away from Satan's unfair Cosmic System. If God took responsibility to care for unbelievers then there would be little motivation for them to change their minds about turning to God. However, for the believers in His plan God will always take care of His own. So regarding the two overall categories of people on earth, God takes care of His believers, but does not take care of those who are aligned with Satan, meaning all unbelievers. And whether the alignment is active acceptance or merely passive does not matter. Rejecting God actively or passively results in the same outcome. God uses the unfair nature of Satan's world to help convince unbelievers to look to Him for salvation and blessing. God is not responsible to help them if they refuse. Therefore, God does not directly prevent the suffering or death of unbelievers even if they appear to be the nicest, most sincere, and otherwise humanly blameless people. There can be an exception for those unbelievers who have shown some positive interest in salvation but have not yet been presented with the proper opportunity. But in general God does not protect unbelievers from suffering since they are under Satan's "care" which is no care at all.

Children who have not yet reached the age of accountability for a decision about salvation are another group. Any child who dies before the age of accountability, which can vary, is treated as saved and goes to heaven. But there are differences between the children of believers and unbelievers regarding protection from God. There is a principle of blessing by association, and therefore children of believers are under more care from God than those of unbelievers since this is blessing from God to the parents.

But that blessing by association is lacking for the children of unbelievers. Although serious harm and "untimely" death can occur to children of believers, these acts are not random as with unbeliever families. These are among the toughest circumstances of why bad things happen to the children of believers, and no one has all the answers. It is not punishment for past sins of the parents, since God does not deal with the issue of individual sins in that way. But some parents can fall into deep guilt unless they understand this principle, and this must be avoided since guilt is not part of God's plan. There are some general principles about why children die young, but one must be careful not to jump to conclusions. However, in general terms only as examples, a young person could die early for some of the following reasons: 1) to spare a family by preventing a worse outcome, possibly a long, drawn out illness; 2) to take a child of a believer before they reach the age of accountability who would not have believed in Christ for salvation, 3) to evangelize other children who could not be reached in other ways, 4) to evangelize family members, maybe extended family, 5) to evangelize strangers by media coverage, 6) for many unknown reasons as part of God's individualized plan for the person and family.

Within the category of believers, God has yet another division which is somewhat less clear to us but also not insignificant. Believers fall into two categories of those pleasing God and those not pleasing God in their spiritual lives. God treats His believers as children who require discipline when they remain clearly out of line for significant periods of time. Those believers who disregard God and His plan for their lives often fall into greater suffering in order to bring them back into alignment with His plan. Believers who disregard God's plan and live as if they were not even believers will suffer as a result of it, not under judgment but under discipline, as within a family. And although there is a difference between judgment, which goes to unbelievers, and discipline, which is for believers, the net result may not seem much different to the one on the receiving end. Job 5:17 says: "Blessed is the one whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. 18 For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal."

Another category of suffering for believers is from testing for the sake of accelerating spiritual growth. Growing believers will face testing since it is necessary to help them achieve growth at a faster rate, and for achieving higher levels of spiritual maturity. This suffering can take many forms, but often appears simply as unfair suffering. The key here is that God requires us to trust Him under such conditions, and when we pass these tests, we grow at a faster rate. But discipline and testing and

random “bad things” are not the same. God does not sponsor random for His own believers, even though we may not be able to separate them on our level. God takes care of and protects His own believers, and in the ways He chooses as fits the unique situation for each believer. And this is where it gets tougher, since we never have the full picture which God has.

Another category involves poor decision making by believers. Although God does not sponsor random harm for His own believers, the believer can act in such a way as to bring on bad outcomes, and God does not support violating good common sense. Believers must not play Russian roulette, take illicit drugs, walk in a bad neighborhood at night for no good reason, walk in heavy traffic, jump from a moving train, exceed the individual’s skill level when doing potentially hazardous things, use a phone while driving and many other examples of actions which violate good sense. God also does not sponsor ill-advised health decisions such as smoking, eating only high fat or high sugar foods, or lack of exercise. And these things are not a matter of sinning, just poor judgment. God does not sponsor poor judgment, so if a believer engages in random reckless behavior, or exercises very poor judgment, they may suffer random harm. This is why Jesus Christ did not jump from the temple tower when tempted by Satan. Satan said God would protect Him. Jesus said to Satan “It is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Matthew 4:7) Making good decisions aligns with God's plan for our lives.

But we all know believers who have engaged in normal behavior and yet suffered an "early" death through no fault of their own. The ultimate answer is that God has a right time for each believer to die, and that means there is no such thing as "early death" for a believer. And especially for those believers who live out their spiritual lives under God's plan, God takes care of such believers no matter the appearance of the death. As for explaining why believers die in apparently random ways, they are not random to God. God may bring a number of believers to a location where they will be killed at the same time by accident or violence. That is God’s right time for each individual one of them to depart the earth. Accidents are not accidents in God's plan. The issue we must fall back upon is that God knows what He is doing, and He has a right time for each of us to die. It is not based on age or any other conditions. It is based on His plan, and His foreknowledge of what was required for each believer. Job 5:26 says: "You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season. ²⁷ “We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself.”

If we lose a loved one who is a believer, God had a good reason for that, and we will likely not know the reason. As hard as it is to understand, often God does not want us to know why such things happen. This is because we must live by faith, not by sight, and must trust that God did what was right, and for the right reasons. Sometimes it was to evangelize an unbeliever at the funeral, sometimes it was to demonstrate a principle we cannot see otherwise, sometimes it was for us to look back on and understand, sometimes it was for us to never know the reason. But every death of a believer is individually managed by God Himself. The reason for each death is that God has a specific reason and time and place for each of His own to die. Ultimately we must understand that we live by faith, not by sight. Trying to figure out every action taken by or allowed by God is not faith.

God requires some believers to be sacrificed for the sake of evangelizing unbelievers we may not even know are impacted. This is a combination of God's right timing for the individual believer and an apparent unfairness of the death which reveals the faith of those individuals and those around them to unbelievers. This is a high calling for some believers, and their eternal reward for such service is increased. We must understand that we are not alive simply to remain alive for a long time. We are alive as believers because God has a plan for each one of us. When that plan is over, it is our time to go be with Him. God sees the overarching plan, but we only see a mere speck of history. It is not for us to know why, or to say how the plan of God should play out.

The issue of innocent people suffering must first be viewed in light of Satan ruling this world, not God refusing to prevent human suffering and tragedy. Satan should be blamed for refusing to prevent the suffering of innocent people who are unbelievers and their children, since they are his responsibility. For believers serving faithfully inside God's plan, God takes care of His own, allowing certain limited suffering and testing as He deems necessary, therefore that does not mean bad things cannot happen at all. For believers who neglect God's plan for their lives, God will try to bring them back into His plan for their life, and that will include suffering which will likely be more intense than suffering used as testing. Those who are growing spiritually need testing to promote greater growth in God's plan, and that will certainly happen. Some believers are called to sacrifice to evangelize unbelievers, including children of believers, and this likely happens more than we might realize. There are many unknowns since God requires all believers to live by faith. Often we will not know the exact answer. But we can know the true answer that God knows what He is doing, that He has an individualized plan for each

believer, that He cares for every believer and their family, and that we must live by faith, not by sight.
(2 Corinthians 5:7)

Why Do People Reject Truth?

One of the least understood issues in human life is why different people can look at the same information, conditions or circumstances and draw opposite conclusions. Some look at the expanse of the universe and the clouds and how the human body works and know instinctively that God created these. Others look at the same things and conclude there is no God and believe the universe occurred from random chance starting with nothing. People look at social and political information and often migrate to polar opposite views, each strongly held. The examples are endless, but how do different people have such divergent views on the same subject when presented with the same information?

The Bible deals with this issue, of course. Although the answer is multi-faceted, there are some key principles involved. The discussion must begin with the fact that the Bible declares there is such a thing as truth, and also that there is non-truth and/or lies, and that there is right and wrong. Philippians 4:8 says "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." Therefore the phrase "it's all relative" is false. "It" is not all relative. There is truth, and there are lies. John 8:44 says "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." And a mixture of partial truth and some lies is also a lie. People can sort them out to a degree if they are honest and willing, and especially believers can sort out truth from lies to a larger degree if they understand the Bible, since the Bible is the standard for absolute truth. Unbelievers can sort out basic truths about many things in life, which is why God gave mankind logic and a divine order for mankind to live under, and it is available for all. But unbelievers do not have access to absolute truth since it is only discerned by the human spirit using information from the Word of God, and they have neither a human spirit nor spiritual access to the Word.

There are two main overarching factors which affect truth acceptance or rejection. The first is the formation of core beliefs by learning, because those core beliefs strongly influence how a person views the world, spiritual issues, and so on. The second main factor which affects truth acceptance or rejection is how the soul of the person functions, and there are proper and improper processes which

can occur in the soul. We discussed the issues related to soul malfunction in the chapter on the soul and human spirit, and those issues will be applied here in the context of truth rejection.

With regard to the first of the two overarching reasons for truth rejection, namely the formation of core beliefs by learning, we need to start by examining how humans know anything at all, and therefore how core beliefs are developed. And it is the core beliefs which are important since they can guide people into either being able to sort out truth from lies, or into accepting lies as truth. That could require a separate book, so we will only summarize the issues here. Core beliefs are firmly held views about important things which in turn drive how we think about the world, God, the divine order on earth, and anything important to us. This is where the human soul and spirit come into play. As noted previously, the human soul is imparted at birth, but it is empty of information. Information taken into the soul is processed and stored, then the person uses it to form core beliefs over time based on what they have learned mixed with individual biases and preferences. This in turn drives how a person perceives the world and all subsequent information they receive, and also what they care about. These core beliefs are usually in categories, with each person having a set of beliefs about values, God, relationships, politics, society, and practically everything of interest in life. These build up norms and standards in the format conscience in the soul, which are then used to evaluate everything in life and judge things to be true or false, good or bad, moral or immoral. And a conscience can be either correct or incorrect depending on what is put into it, and can allow a person to avoid the truth if not properly developed with accurate information.

People generally learn information in one of five basic ways, 1) by empirical sensory information (sight, smell, taste, sound, feel, etc), 2) by memorizing basic factual information, 3) by rational reasoning (developing new information on one's own), 4) by proving something scientifically on their own, or 5) by accepting information as it is provided by others (called "faith"). Humans learn very little by rational reasoning, which requires deep thought about a subject and drawing new conclusions which have not been previously learned. This is what Albert Einstein was famous for doing. Then one must ask why that information is accurate, and he was often inaccurate as was later learned. Regarding scientific proof, very few people can prove things scientifically for themselves, except basic math and such, so most scientific information is learned by faith, not by proof since it must be proven by each individual in order to be proof to them. Then there are the senses which tell us a lot empirically about

the things seen, observed, heard, felt, tasted, etc. and most of the raw data which enters the soul comes in empirically through the senses. But the senses teach very little about what is behind the things sensed. For instance, were the things around us created by God or was it all just an accident of nature? The senses cannot provide an answer. Although the senses provide most of the inputs in life, they generally do not form core beliefs, just sensory data which allows us to move around in the world and interact physically with it. Knowing not to put one's hand into a fire is important information, but not a core belief, just self preservation. We memorize a lot of facts, but that does not develop core beliefs. By far the majority of what is learned by humans which becomes core beliefs comes from accepting information as it is presented by others, namely by faith. Faith is not limited to religion, not even close to it. Schools are a faith-based method of learning, with an occasional lab for demonstrations to the senses. Faith is accepting the authority of another to convey information, then generally accepting what they say. Reading, conversations, internet sites, friends, media, and other sources of information are also faith-based learning. Of course, the information can be true or false, or a mixture of the two, or can be misunderstood. Humans accept most of what leads to their core beliefs during their lifetime by faith, but the key to whether the things learned are true is in the source of the information.

Most people do not realize the degree to which they relied on faith to come to their present state of core beliefs. They went to school and learned by faith apart from proof most of what became their core beliefs. Were the teachers providing truth, fiction, theories, opinions, or otherwise? Usually it is an mixture. If the information is self-proving like basic math, whereby you have one item in your hand, then pick up another and then have two, that is not about core beliefs. But with regard to core beliefs people learn and accept many things from the internet, media, friends, etc., but they did not require proof for most of that information, and some or much of it is false or mixed lineage at best. The test for faith and the validity of the resulting information is in the source. The source of the information in the Bible is God, and He is the only source for absolute truth. There is no more trustworthy source. The source in school or on the internet is always fallible. And if God and Christ are rejected, what is the source of the information which is used instead to form core beliefs? Nothing proven, and often a jumbled and discordant collection of inputs which led to a set of core beliefs, whether strongly or loosely held, which were never proven and often can be summarized as an eclectic conglomeration. Therefore if the core beliefs are wrong, it will be difficult for truth to get through to the person in the

affected areas. Sometimes only certain core beliefs are misguided. Most people have a mixture. It is only those core beliefs which are based on the Word of God which line up with absolute truth.

The Bible is clear about certain basic truths, that God exists, that He created the universe, and that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. These are some of the numerous absolutes revealed in the Bible. Christians accept Biblical teachings because we believe the source is God, and that God cannot be wrong. Some mock and deride the faith of believers by saying proof is required before such things can be believed. That is a literal impossibility for most things of importance, whether related to God or other issues, but certainly when discussing the origins of the universe, God and His plan, salvation, the soul and human spirit and all such things. The origin of the universe and many things related to God are not provable because God does not want them to be provable, since He requires us to live by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7) Non-creationists believe in the unbelievable, making enormous leaps of faith across great chasms to come to conclusions which are entirely unsupported, yet they claim that science is on their side. However they change their unproven theories constantly, basing core beliefs on a set of ever changing theories which are unprovable. Additionally, the lines between scientific proof and computer models have become blurred in order to declare something scientifically proven, when the outcome of models is by definition not proof, but is based on variable assumptions fed into the models by fallible and biased humans using limited information. If they knew enough to fully feed a model, then the model would not be needed since the issue would be self-proving.

Once a person has developed core beliefs, the key to why the truth is so often rejected lies within the soul. The soul has components as discussed previously, and the soul can use different parts to form beliefs, to come to conclusions, and ultimately to think. God designed a primary and logical pathway for thinking, which involves the various logical components of the soul advising the soul's heart, the engine of integrating information, generating conclusions and emitting expressions from the soul. Recall that the heart is not the emotions as is often erroneously stated, but rather the thinking and processing engine of the soul which interfaces with the outside world and with God. The logical advisors to the heart are the mind, conscience, memories, and other component advisors, and for the believer it also includes the human spirit which processes and stores spiritual information. God is the author of logic, and has given it to the human race as a gift. But there is a lifelong battle in the soul of

each person over which advisors the soul's heart will listen to when making decisions, whether it will be the logical advisors or the sinful nature backed by an out-of-control emotions, which are an illogical duo. The logical advisors are normally aligned in opposition to the sinful nature, with its sinful tendencies and lust patterns which seeks to gain the upper hand as an illicit advisor to the heart. The soul's emotions can revolt and take the side of the sinful nature, aligning in opposition to the logical advisors, making bad decisions more difficult to avoid. This can lead to feeling one's way through life rather than thinking one's way through. The emotions do not think, so they merely respond to either the heart backed by the logical advisors or else to the sinful nature. The emotions were designed by God to respond in pleasure to the heart in alignment with the logical advisors of the soul, however the emotions can also misalign with the sinful nature. This makes the emotions the wild card of the soul, sometimes aligning with the logical advisors, and sometimes aligning with the sinful nature. When the emotions become the near permanent ally of the sinful nature, the two combined overwhelm the heart and essentially stage a coup, taking over the thinking making it an illogical process in the affected areas. And since the sinful nature is the ally of Satan, the person becomes allied with Satan's Cosmic System which at its core is a system of lies and illogic, and is opposed to God and truth. This is how the emotions can create instability inside the soul when allied with the sinful nature, and if severe enough it can result in overall mental instability. The emotions in the soul are meant to respond to what the heart concludes, not to advise it, so the emotions are not one of the logical advisors to the heart. So when the logical advisors are set aside in favor of the sinful nature which has gained the alliance of the emotions, logic and truth become victims, and lies can be easily accepted. This most often happens as a result of seeking continuous pleasure at the expense of responsible behavior, which trains the emotions to revolt and support the sinful nature. As pleasure and "fun" become the main goals in life, responsible actions take a back seat. And since unbelievers have no human spirit, the sinful nature's influence is harder to avoid and therefore can more easily become the dominant influence on their heart. When the heart of the soul is taken over by the sinful nature backed by the emotions, the logical advisors of the soul, including the human spirit for the believer, are mostly shut off from influencing the heart, while the sinful nature and emotions run the soul. Over time the logical advisors even become corrupted, as the mind and conscience take on distorted patterns and cease to be capable of logic. At that point, rejection of truth is not only possible, but rather becomes locked-in as the norm. This can be isolated to certain areas of life, or it can be broad-based, so this does not mean they cannot properly apply what they have learned about a specific subject area such as math, engineering, sports,

welding, teaching or such since that information can be applied as rote memory and apart from emotional interference if the person chooses to do so. The emotions are usually not concerned about the mundane subject-based areas of life so they allow application of subject-specific memory to those areas without undue interference.

Therefore we can see why so many people look at truth and call it a lie, and also why a lie is called truth. Some people look at life from the viewpoint of the soul under the control of the heart accepting the advice of the logical advisors inside the soul, and they generally see the true reality of the situation. Other people look at life from the viewpoint of the heart under the control of the sinful nature backed by the emotions which are out of control, and the resulting viewpoint can reject truth no matter how compelling and obvious it is. In this latter state the person literally cannot think clearly in certain areas since neither the sinful nature nor the emotions are logical or rational. Therefore the inputs which are able to get through to the heart are from these non-thinking sources, and the person's soul can become more and more out of control. This explains why different people can have such divergent views on the same subject when presented with the same information. The key is whether the soul is under the control of the heart accepting the advice of the logical advisors inside the soul and the human spirit for the believer, or whether the soul's heart is under the control of the sinful nature backed by emotions which are out of control, relegating the logical advisors of the soul to a position of low regard. These two viewpoints are 180 degrees out of phase. If this out of control state inside the soul exists long enough the heart will essentially be bypassed by the combined sinful nature and emotions, which end up doing the "pseudo thinking" for the person. But in reality it is not thought at all, but rather pure Cosmic System emotional expression from a soul which is out of control and under the near-total influence of the sinful nature.

The sinful nature aligned with the emotions sets up roadblocks to truth, denying it access so that it is not even considered. The primary logical advisors of the heart are by-passed, and the soul must use alternate pathways to form its expressions to the outside world. These "alternate pathways" explain why such divergent views are not only possible, but entirely "logical" to the person firmly holding illogical views. The sinful nature teamed up with the wild card emotions becomes the primary alternate pathway for expressions, and one of the main keys to understanding the issue of truth reception vs. rejection. The sinful nature and emotions end up doing the "pseudo thinking" for the

person. In reality it is not thought at all, but rather Cosmic System emotional expression from a soul under the dictatorial control of the sinful nature supported by a fluttering emotion, which results in a soul which is unable to think logically or see the truth. Trying to change the mind of someone locked into this condition using facts and logic is futile, since facts and logic go through the logical advisors to the heart, which have been by-passed. The roadblocks of the soul, the sinful nature allied with the emotions, do not let logic in to even be considered. This is the meaning of "hardness of heart" in the Bible, since the heart is hardened off and displaced as the primary mechanism of logical integrated thinking as God designed it to be. Hardness of the heart is a Bible analogy to hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis), whereby the heart of the soul is barely able to operate due to being shut off from the flow required to allow it to function. So also the roadblocks to the soul's heart shut down the flow of logic, and the thinking processes grind to a halt. "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts." (Ephesians 4:18) The only way to counter and overcome the sinful nature-emotions lock on the soul is through a very intensive study and application of the Word of God, but at this point that becomes very difficult.

Although totally illogical, Cosmic System lies make sense to someone who has a soul locked into a sinful nature - emotional freeway through the soul. Of course, such people can choose some areas of life to wall off from this status, and the sinful nature of each person has different areas of focus, which drives the soul expressions in different ways. This often results in a dual personality, sometimes mild or sometimes resulting in neurosis or psychosis. So a person under hardness of heart generally does not reject all truth from all sources, but typically chooses certain areas of life as a focus where they turn off their rational lie detector. Therefore this status is not necessarily all or nothing, so it can either be isolated to certain subject areas or it can be widespread, since there can be pockets of logic if the person has built up strong standards in those areas, but overall the soul is able to easily reject truth in the affected areas. If this continues long enough it usually will become broad-based, often with some specific areas of interest becoming all-consuming with an associated passionate approach to illogical expression. This is also where mental gymnastics come into play, using irrational tools such as denial, dissociation, compartmentalization, and self delusion instead of logic to enable the person to believe the unbelievable. The emotions therefore back the sinful nature to prevent rational thinking, while at the same time enabling illogical mental gymnastics, even among people who pride themselves as being

superior in "knowledge"; but their knowledge is ultimately foolishness. The emotions cannot think so they become a domineering queen which reigns over a dysfunctional soul directed by the queen's Rasputin in the form of the sinful nature. Only the heart can think by integrating the inputs from the various logical advisors such as the conscience, memories, and so on, but when it is by-passed by the sinful nature allied with the out of control emotions, the person literally cannot think clearly about certain subjects, but can only emote within the cosmic system jumble of pseudo information, which are lies.

The person who emotes their way through life will especially reject the truth when it comes to issues which relate to God and other important information which Satan opposes, and that is another key to why truth is rejected. Satan tries to interfere with people seeing God as the source of truth, but what is less understood, Satan also interferes with important areas of life which God has ordained for an orderly society under which people can make decisions about God and His plan. These areas include nations, politics, economics, the media and many other issues since Satan wants to distort them and entice individuals and groups of people to join Satan's side and clean up his mess while opposing God's plan and His rules for nations, society, authority, human interactions, and so on. Politics often becomes one of these all-consuming passions for illogic since it is an area which Satan tries to influence, since it is associated with power, and Satan constantly seeks to influence those with power. Therefore Satan especially focuses on gaining advantages at certain strategic areas of life, such as politics and the media, since they are one of the most efficient and effective ways for Satan to broadcast lies into the general population. Satan is the "father of lies" and Satan's Cosmic System is fueled by lies. The primary areas of truth rejection often begin with God and spiritual truths, and are followed by other areas where Satan has specific interests in influencing the future of history. Remember why this matters to Satan, that he is highly focused on changing the outcome of his sentence to the Lake of Fire. Satan has few remaining options, so he tries to affect the outcome of human history in an attempt to prevent God's prophecies from coming to pass, attempting to show God to be a liar just like Satan, therefore no better than Satan. Satan's blasphemous plan may not look like a rational one, but he has already failed at all his primary plans, so at this point distortion of truth is one of his few remaining options to somehow prove God is unfair or a liar. That is why the world is so full of lies, because Satan is entirely focused on destroying truth wherever it exists, especially among believers who seek the truth of the Word, but also among unbelievers in areas where Satan can influence the future course of history

to his presumed advantage. Therefore Satan directs his lies toward the human race as he attempts to alter his decreed outcome. Most people of the world are inside Satan's Cosmic System, and they are therefore influenced by that system to promote Satan's lies. This becomes another primary reason why people can have such divergent views on these issues, namely this outside influence from Satan's Cosmic System. And when this combines with the internal influences from the soul with a hardened heart under the control of the sinful nature and backed by the out of control emotions people can gravitate toward a lie no matter how convincing the truth may be if it is in their sinful nature's area of focus. When a person is consumed with lies they are also consumed with its ugly cousin hatred because they go together. Liars are haters and haters are liars. That pretty much defines Satan as a creature, a liar filled with hatred. Truth rejection is therefore highest among those subjects where Satan is most interested, which starts with God and spiritual truths, and proceeds into areas which can affect the future outcome of human history, and where people tend to gravitate with their passionate illogic. Nothing can be proven to a person under such circumstances. Logic is replaced by whatever feels right. But the sinful nature takes over to determine what is "right", so that means wrong easily becomes right, therefore the conscience becomes distorted. This is the ultimate answer to why different people look at the same information, conditions or circumstances and draw opposite conclusions. It is the answer to why people reject the truth in favor of the lie. It is the answer to why Satan's plan is so popular among people. It is also the answer to why so many people will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire apart from God. If their soul is out of control, dominated by the sinful nature in alliance with the emotions, they look at the truth and call it a lie, and they look at a lie and call it the truth. The longer they do so, the easier it becomes. The soul develops untruthful ruts into which the next thoughts fall and ride through uninterrupted by rational thinking.

There are two methods of corroborating what we have learned and believe to be true, and both are established by God. There is common sense, which lines up with what the universe reveals to us, and there is absolute truth, which is revealed by God in the Bible. God designed the universe to reveal to people the proper way to live, even for unbelievers. The universe provides feedback loops to encourage and discourage certain types of behaviors, shows what works over and over again, and what does not work. Some things have good outcomes, and some things bad outcomes. Responsible behavior, hard work, fair play, and good manners are generally rewarded, and irresponsibility in these areas is generally punished. Of course there are random outcomes and unfairness, but generally we

learn that certain types of behaviors repeat with certain types of outcomes. Then there is the truth from the Word of God, and that is absolute truth. We have faith in God that the Bible is truth, and that is part of our belief system. As we grow in the Word the Holy Spirit provides a spiritual feedback loop which demonstrates to us that our faith was correctly placed in the Word, and our faith is justified to us over time. Therefore common sense and the Word of God both serve to keep us in line with the truth, if we choose to do so.

People who reject God and the Bible must by definition accept something else. Once they reject God they can easily accept irrational theories regarding how the material universe came from nothing, and developed from nothing into something, then that something became what the universe is now. By any definition that is a succession of miracles. So unbelievers do believe in miracles after all since the probability of that happening has been calculated as being zero. Literally zero over infinity. Such theories require an unbeliever to have far more faith than Christians who believe in God and believe the Bible that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. The universe itself is testimony to the existence of God and to what the Bible reveals, and these things support our faith. Therefore the faith of believers is far more logical than the faith of unbelievers. Our corroborating evidence is revealed in the universe, and also in the results we see from God working through believers, which also supports what the Bible reveals. Romans 8:16 says "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Our faith is not blind, but the faith of unbelievers in what they believe is blindness inside of darkness. Unbelievers cannot prove many of the theories they accept which form their core beliefs so they must accept most by faith, yet they seek to deny this. That faith of unbelievers in choosing to accept what they believe can be very strong. But they regularly believe things which are unbelievable, and they do so with no proof whatsoever even though many of them insist proof is required to believe anything. Oddly, this does not dissuade many unbelievers from their belief systems. Even so, there is an explanation for why people are able to engage in such illogical logic. Which brings us to our main point of why and how people so often reject the truth, even though the truth is much easier to believe since it makes so much more sense.

The revolt in the soul which leads to irrationality causes other serious issues for the person, as the mental state will deteriorate over time. The resulting mental instability leads to locked-in arrogance which rejects many types of authority, and promotes other mental sins such as hatred, jealousy and

envy which cause a severe narrowing of mental tolerance and a near total inability to accept any form of truth in the areas of sinful nature-emotion dominance. When this truth denial becomes non-selective it becomes a neurosis or psychosis, but most people do not reach that level of across the board truth rejection. Some areas usually remain fact-based due to long held beliefs which cannot be ignored, and these can remain islands of rationality in a sea of irrationality. But even so, a mental tsunami from the sinful nature-emotion alliance can wipe out even such islands of rationality, especially when mental sins are intense and all-consuming. In a broad spectrum takeover of the soul by the sinful nature backed by the emotions, the sinful nature causes patterns of mental sins to come to the forefront which combine into a group of sins to further blind the person to the truth. These mental sins can overwhelm the soul and cause a shutdown of the heart, at least in certain areas of life. The person then lives on the lusts of the sinful nature. These lusts are not always the carnal type, but rather power, monetary, superiority, and many other lusts are equally possible. Generally, the mixture of lusts and sins distort the world view. Smug arrogance of superiority based on Cosmic System self-centeredness and self absorption are the means of self esteem, which is a house of cards. Cosmic System devices such as self delusion, self absorption, transference, and denial reject the logical deliberations of the soul, and result in a soul which is out of control, unable to process information in a logical manner except of course in narrow areas of mechanical skills and wrote memory application to a job or hobby. The mental sin combo of arrogance, envy, jealousy, and hatred rejects truth and authority other than one's own. Such people live on lies as their basis for a world view, and truth is a casualty. Isaiah 59:4 says of them: "no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. ^s They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and when one is broken, an adder is hatched."

Rejection of truth is not usually a matter of intelligence (IQ). Intelligent and highly educated people have the ability to believe untruths just as easily as anyone else, possibly more so when their soul is out of control under the influence of the sinful nature, which results in an arrogance of intellect for them. A person who is less educated may not know as many facts about the world around them, but they will accept the truth when properly presented if their soul is functioning properly under humility. The propensity for rejecting truth and therefore accepting untruths is primarily a matter of how the person's soul is functioning, not a matter of education or intellect. And humility plays a key role in truth acceptance.

Truth can also be rejected for other reasons. Some people simply do not care about spiritual issues, so they ignore them. Ignoring is rejecting. This is a simpler form of rejection of the truth based on distraction due to a focus on the details of life. People focus on their job, family and other things and do not stop to think about their eternal future, or they think there is no eternal future to think about. Some have a simple form of relative righteousness, and think they are better than many other people they see around them so if there is a God He would favor them over those they see as morally inferior. It is why so many conversations in life attempt to compare oneself with others, putting down others to build oneself up in their own eyes, and in the eyes of others. In another vein, it is also why wealth is said to make salvation more difficult, since wealthy people think they have all they need without God so they ignore spiritual issues. But these rejections of truth are more a matter of lack of caring, not a hardened view toward God, or a soul out of control, which are the primary issues under discussion here.

This brings us to a central point about how salvation is accepted, and also how truth is acquired from the Bible. God requires both to be by faith, and only by faith. Faith is the only method authorized by God for acquiring spiritual information, and is done apart from the merit and work of the recipient. Therefore faith is the only fair way for God to provide salvation, and also spiritual information afterward. God specifically excluded salvation by the senses or by deep thinking using rationalism or any form of proof since these are based on merit and individual effort. God made salvation fair to all by basing it on faith in Jesus Christ, not by coming to a conclusion using intellect. Some people are smarter, grasp issues quicker, see more clearly what others do not see, and can prove things using intelligence-based methods easier than others. Using such merit-based processes as a means for salvation would be patently unfair, since some would have inherent advantages over others. Therefore only the smartest and deepest thinkers would be saved. God rejects such unfairness. Instead, salvation is by faith only, and the message of salvation can be easily understood by anyone who is willing to listen and consider it. God does not allow His plan for salvation to be proven, and therefore requires that it must be accepted only by faith. The faith of the person is apart from any work or merit, therefore mankind can take no credit for any part of salvation, leaving all the credit to Jesus Christ the Savior. He did the work. He gets the credit and glory. And therefore salvation is a free gift from God.

The human spirit plays an important role in accepting the absolute truth of the Word of God, and only believers have a human spirit. As 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: "The person without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness." And Romans 8:16 says: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." For humans to interact with God they need a human spirit, otherwise God cannot interact with them, and they cannot understand God or His spiritual truth. The higher levels of spiritual truth require a human spirit filled with the basic levels of spiritual truth. Truth is built on truth. Proverbs 1:7 says: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Humility, acceptance of God's authority, acceptance of the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, and an understanding of basic truths are the basis of understanding absolute truths.

Other methods of denying and rejecting truth involve falling into Cosmic System fallacy traps. These can include the fallacy that all opinions have equal value, so that the opinion of every person must be valued. That assumes there is no truth. The truth is what must be valued, not opinions. Of course, people who believe what is false should be encouraged to see why the truth is better. That is why the gospel needs to be the first message to such people since it is the starting place for all truth. But every opinion either lines up with truth or it does not. Opinions which are opposed to the truth are lies, and should be treated as such. There is also a method of denying truth which says that if someone who is generally on the side of truth fails in some way, then all their arguments are wrong. This is the "hypocrisy" fallacy of denying truth, whereby someone is labeled a hypocrite and therefore everything they say is unworthy of one's attention. This is often used on Christians, who are all sinners, but are often labeled hypocrites for being believers yet continuing to sin. All believers sin, so this fallacy focuses on a non-issue to distort and deny truth, especially the gospel of salvation. Then there is the fallacy of same-same, which says that for every lie there is someone on the side of truth who has at some point been associated with something which appears to be, or even actually is, untrue. This fallacy states that lies and truth cannot be sorted out since they are so mixed in together. Again, God rejects relative comparisons as the method of separating truth from lies. Truth is truth, and lies are lies. Using distortions to compare the two is a Cosmic System effort to confuse humans into relative thinking, and make them think Satan is just as acceptable as God. This is one of Satan's most powerful tactics, and we see continually how so many fall into the "same-same" trap. Then of course there is the "it's all relative" fallacy whereby people seek to deny there is any truth at all, and therefore no right or

wrong, so no one can declare anything unacceptable. There are others, but these serve to illustrate various methods of denying, disregarding, and distorting the truth. It is worth repeating John 8:44 which says "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

In conclusion, people reject truth mostly because they form core beliefs based on falsehoods. Many of them allow their emotions to join their sinful nature in a revolt against the soul's heart, which leads to an illogical method of "thinking." Under this condition the soul is dominated by a sinful nature allied with the emotions, which overwhelms the soul's heart and excludes the logical advisors to the heart from having input. Alternate pathways in the soul are formed which by-pass the logical advisors as the source of logic and truth. Under such conditions the heart can no longer come to logical conclusions, so the expressions of the soul come instead from the sinful nature - emotion alliance. And Satan's Cosmic System constantly promotes distortions and lies. These result in truth being rejected in favor of the lie, and the longer this continues, the more locked in it becomes. God is the author of logic and truth, and has given these as gifts to mankind. Rejection of truth is therefore rejection of God and His plan.

Secular Religion During the Tribulation

Now that we understand how and why truth rejection is so easy when a person's soul becomes locked into an out-of-control state, we should examine some of the results on God's plan, Satan's strategy, and human history. There is a historical trend underway which seeks to deny the existence of God and instead worship at the shrine of human causes, turning those causes into a false religion without a god, thus a secular religion. Romans 1:28 says: "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator." These objects of worship can be based on political activism, radical environmentalism, climate change, the social gospel, gender activism, or whatever strikes the emotional tuning fork of the "worshippers". Of course they deny it is a religion, but it contains all the factors which can be called worship. It is a deep-seated belief system which views their object of focus as the source of their own self-worth and reason for existence, therefore they treat it as sacrosanct, and the thing which must be given the place of highest honor among all other things. Although organized religions have a system of doctrines or guiding principles, secular religion has only an emotional and therefore zealous approach to the world around them based on secular concepts and objects of worship. Philippians 3:19 says: "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach [emotions], and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things." It is an approach to life where the guiding principles focus on a misplaced and misguided attempt at betterment of the world, which Satan rules. To the followers of this secular religion there is no God or gods, only a focus on humanistic reforms deemed important to their "righteous cause." In this regard secular religionists seek to replace worship of God with worship of something secular, something which can give meaning to their otherwise empty life. It can be the earth itself, human progress, environmentalism, total equality of outcomes for everyone, an ideal brotherhood in which all practice what is "moral and good" as they mis-define these, or a number of other secular causes. But why should we care? After all, there are plenty of misguided people doing misguided things in this world.

The reason to care is that secular religion will be at a peak during the Tribulation when the Antichrist will rule much of the earth under the guise of the head of a secular religion where he is its secular savior, not for the soul but for secular causes. This secular religion will enable the rise of the Antichrist, and will make him into a secular hero who will lead billions of people astray into the most

vicious system of evil during all of human history. This man will be personally indwelt by Satan, something which is extremely rare since Satan normally leaves such messy details to his demons. This secular religion under the Antichrist will lure people in as it promises to save them from global unrest, bring about world peace, heal the earth by stopping global climate change, make all people equal, make no distinction among choices by sex, and provide economic benefit to those who worship this religion. This secular religion will also use copycat tricks to make the Antichrist into a substitute for the true Messiah Jesus Christ, since this man will be viewed at that time as the secular savior of the world, and even a god, although that is an oxymoron in a secular religion. Not that Satan was ever accused of being rational.

Those who reject the truth based on a broad spectrum takeover of the soul by the sinful nature backed by the emotions can easily end up in a secular religion whereby they worship human powered self improvement and furtherance of causes rather than worship God. Extreme humanism and liberalism best represent this secular religion sponsored by Satan. They preach love but their focus is hate for those who are not one of them. They preach a love of freedom but what they truly love is lack of responsibility for one's own actions, and they seek to take away the freedoms of those who oppose them. They preach tolerance yet are intolerant to the extreme. They preach helping the downtrodden yet seek to destroy those who are not on their side. These are very much aligned with Satan's thinking and plan where the end result justifies any means used to achieve it. The secular religionist seeks total liberty to do as they please, but in reality instead of having liberty they are simply libertine, seeking liberty without responsibility. They seek freedom from accountability for their actions, which is unobtainable. And at the same time they want to deny others the freedom to think and act in ways different from how they think and act, especially if it is related to Christianity. Their search for total liberty without responsibility or accountability enslaves them to their sinful nature inside Satan's plan, and therefore to Satan himself, the father of lies. Their so-called liberty is not the individual liberty God has established in His plan, whereby all individuals are free to choose for or against God, which is individual liberty with responsibility and accountability under nations which protect the rights and freedoms of every individual. God is the author of liberty, while Satan is the author of slavery, yet secular religionists reject God's liberty and therefore must accept Satan's slavery, which is the only alternative.

Under secular religion those who worship the true God are called heretics who must be eliminated. In contrast, God's plan is to allow all to make choices from their own free will and live with the consequences, which is a live and let live approach. The reality behind secular religion is that the proponents try to ignore God but cannot. They fall prey to Satan and become his slaves, meaning Satan becomes their god. Satan is the father of lies, a cheater, and a murderer from the beginning. Since this is the one they follow they become like him, and will end up with him in eternity. It is no surprise the secular zealots are liars themselves. Look at their approach, what they say about those who disagree with them, how they do not hesitate to lie and cheat to gain any advantage. They are clearly representing Satan's approach when they do so. Achievement of the goal is what matters to them, not how they get to it. Lying, cheating, deceiving, and even murder are all just a means which can be justified by the end result. They become like their evil mentor and sponsor Satan -- liars, haters, inwardly focused, godless automatons. And current trends have not yet reached the peak of evil the world will experience during the Tribulation. But the softening process must come first if the masses are to be prepared to accept the master secular religionist called the Antichrist.

Secular religion is mankind's way to cope with their own eventual death which looms over their lives. Denial and dissociation are mental gymnastic tools used to avoid thinking about death, while the person practices human powered self-improvement as a means to personal redemption. Comparative analysis is used to show there is always someone worse than they are, providing some secular comfort. These secular religionists may even have fleeting thoughts of some mystical cosmic force which will suck them all up into the universal ether in some lasting way, giving them an idea of possible immortality. But death still looms large over them, and there is no escape. So they cope by turning to self-improvement, saving the planet, and other humanistic causes as a means of self-redemption apart from God. But no matter how they try, the secular religionist has no hope, no power in the life, no meaning, and no understanding of why they are on earth. This thinking will reach a peak during the Tribulation under the rule of the Antichrist and will enable his rise to power.

Secular religion finds it acceptable to hate and even kill those who violate its "doctrines". Without God their religion is one of worshiping the earth and humanistic causes as sacrosanct and therefore as a god. Harming the earth is harming its "god", therefore those who would harm their object of worship or even deny the existence of the harm are heretics and blasphemers who must be destroyed. Salvation in

this secular religion comes by making a difference, such as saving the planet. Radical environmentalists evangelize regarding global climate change, and want to destroy those who do not convert. Questioning environmentalism, equality of outcomes, or any “progressive” thinking is blasphemy against their secular religion and is called hate, and therefore worthy of the secular religionist's own hatred, punishment, imprisonment, and even death. The Bible itself is therefore deemed to be hateful, especially Romans 1 20-32:

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

Looking at historical examples is useful to help explain the concepts just covered. When Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah during His earthly ministry, the Jewish leadership rejected Him immediately. This was in spite of His miracles, His teachings which lined up with what the Messiah would teach, His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and His credible answers to all of their

questions to Him. They were blinded by their own arrogance and lust for power, which they did not want to lose, and they refused to look at the truth in the form of their own Messiah. Although they tried over and over to prove He was a faker, they never succeeded. So they ultimately decided to execute Him without cause, and in violation of their own laws of evidence and jurisprudence. This hardness of heart by the Pharisees shows how closed-minded someone, or a group of people, can become when the soul is locked into a pattern ruled by the sinful nature and backed by the emotions. They simply cannot see the truth no matter how convincing it may be. And explaining and teaching is not the answer for most such people, since the Pharisees rejected the teachings of the best teacher in history. Another past historical example of a large secular religion was the Soviet Union. As an entity it denied God and made the State into a god. The ends justified the means, according to its prophets Lenin and Marx. Working for the State brought glory and redemption. Millions were murdered to enable "progress". It was a microcosm of the Satanic system -- dark, cold, and inhuman. Under such a secular religion, whether the adherents realize it or not, Satan becomes their god, and everyone else is nobody and therefore expendable. Contrast that with God's plan where each individual is allowed to live in freedom to make their own decisions for or against God, and God also allows each one to live with their own choices and reap the consequences.

But the ultimate in secular religion will occur during the future Tribulation when Satan pulls out all the stops and lashes out in every direction hoping against hope that somehow he can avoid his certain doom. It will all fail, but not before the human race suffers in unimaginable ways, especially those who take the easy route of truth rejection and follow his evil plan. And although it may seem inconceivable, the vast majority of the human race at that time will reject the truth and follow Satan's plan of chaos, hatred, and evil as they approve of killing Christians simply for their belief in Jesus Christ, and line up in agreement with those who punish anyone who does not comply with the evil government of the Antichrist. Truth will be rejected as never before in human history. Right will be called wrong and wrong will be called right. The world will be turned upside down. And it will be enabled, encouraged, and cheered on by the overwhelming majority of people on the earth at that time. They will approve as innocent people are imprisoned and murdered by their governments. Any form of opposition to the evil government will be the highest level crime, while ordinary crime will become rampant. Those who believe in the true God and the Bible will be declared an enemy of the State, and

many thousands of believers will die for their faith. This is why there will need to be an Armageddon, because the world will be so evil, and the people so irretrievable in hardness of heart.

We see the pattern of hardness of heart all around us. Many issues the Bible declares to be wrong have become the poster children for declaring discriminatory practices among those who simply state an objection. The proper roles of government have been hijacked. People instantly gravitate to hardened positions about a vast array of subjects, and the truth is ignored in the debate over how to proceed with common issues. Civility and common courtesy are thrown out in the interest of proving the correctness of one's own indefensible positions. Those who defend actual truth, teach the Bible, support lawful procedure, and believe in the right to exercise individual liberty to live and let live, and do so under proper motivations, are declared to be a fringe element which must be eliminated. This is all due to the majority of people rejecting God's truth and allowing the sinful nature and emotions to take over their souls. When God and His truth are ignored there are only lies remaining. And Satan is right there to help promote those lies and convince his followers of their legitimacy. This will be the pattern of the Tribulation when the divine order God has ordained will be replaced by total lawlessness under the rule of Satan, and administered by the Antichrist. Secular religion will bring the world down to a level of hate-filled intolerance never before seen, and the police state will murder Christians by the many thousands for simply believing in Jesus Christ as Savior. And the earth will also end up in near ruin, despite the secular religious fervor to save the planet and promote other forms of humanistic causes. This is the legacy of secular religion, that it is powerless except for doing harm, and has no power to do actual good as defined in the Bible.

This leads us to our next topic, which is why there will be a period of time called the Tribulation.

Why The Tribulation?

Humans have experienced great suffering over the course of history, but nothing can compare with what will happen during the Tribulation. This future seven year period will bring great judgments during which most of the people on the earth will die, probably over 90% of them. That is many billions of people dead in just seven years. Mountains will be flattened as earthquakes change the surface of the earth. Every living thing in all the oceans will die. Nearly all food will be destroyed, and most of the world's drinking water will be poisoned. There will be horrible plagues. Demons will take physical form and attack and kill humans. There will be nuclear warfare. At the end of the seven years of the Tribulation when the earth is in near ruin the Second Advent of Jesus Christ will occur, and He will end the Tribulation at Armageddon. Then He will institute the Millennial Kingdom, heal the earth, and reign on this same earth for a thousand years under perfect environment and perfect peace. The details of what will happen during the Tribulation are too complex to be covered here, but they are covered in my book "The Future Times" which is available free online if more information is desired. Here we will focus on why all of this will happen, and why God allows such horrible human suffering on such a massive scale.

The Tribulation fits into the Ages which God has ordained. As previously noted, the Ages divide human history into periods of time which are used to prove various aspects of God's grace to man, and also prove to Satan why he must spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. God has divided human history into the following Ages:

- 1) Age of the Patriarchs: from Adam until Moses (i.e., Israel established as a nation)
- 2) Age of Israel Part I: from Moses to the Cross, then an interruption inserts the Church Age
- 3) Age of the Church: from the Cross until the Rapture (Resurrection of the Church)
- 4) Age of Israel Part II: resumes and finishes Age of Israel during the seven year Tribulation
- 5) Millennium: the 1000 year reign of Christ completes human history.

We see the Tribulation is part of the Age of Israel which is split into two separate parts, with the Church Age inserted between those two parts. The Tribulation will resume and finish the seven years God owes to Israel as part of the Age of Israel as prophesied in Daniel 9, since that Age was interrupted

seven years short of completion of the "seventy sevens" when the Church Age was instituted shortly after the cross on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3). It is important to understand that the Tribulation is part of the Age of Israel since this explains many things about events which will occur during that period of time. The Church is taken out by the Rapture (resurrection) of the Church before the Tribulation begins. Therefore this is reason #1 why there will be a Tribulation, namely that it fulfills the prophecy of Daniel 9 concerning the "seventy sevens" and finishes the Jewish Age, since the prophecy requires seven more years to complete that Age.

The Tribulation is Satan's last gasp, his final chance during the course of his long appeal trial to prove he should not be put into the Lake of Fire forever, as God has already decreed. These will be his last seven years of freedom, after which he will be put in chains for 1000 years during the Millennium and then put into the Lake of Fire forever. We have previously noted how Satan's strategy unfolds in stages and focuses on different issues during different periods of time called Ages in the Bible. His primary focus and most ambitious plans were aimed at the promised Messiah Jesus Christ, as Satan first tried to prevent His arrival, then tried to kill Him or stop Him from providing salvation during His First Advent. Once those had failed, Satan's focus changed to proving God to be a liar by trying to prevent Biblical prophecies from being fulfilled as God has promised. Satan reasons that if any prophesy of the Bible is not fulfilled, then God has lied, and God would be as imperfect as Satan. So this is reason #2 regarding why the Tribulation occurs, namely that Satan is in his last gasp effort to stay out of the Lake of Fire, and he uses this period to make his final argument.

That final argument of Satan starts out one way but ends up another. He will start by trying to set up a copycat millennial kingdom where all mankind loves and worships him, but he will end up trying to kill everyone involved. Very Satan-like. Satan is not as smart or powerful as he thinks he is, and certainly not compared to God. But his final argument starts at the beginning of the Tribulation as an attempt to show that Satan can provide mankind with the good things God has promised in Bible prophecy, and sooner, and also without all the "restrictions" God imposes, such as salvation. Most people do not think Satan ever does anything except cause harm, but Satan uses all forms of false inducement of people to gain advantages, and Satan wants man to worship him, not God. Therefore Satan's strategy during the Tribulation begins with an attempt to convince as many people as possible to join with him and reject God's plan for salvation and live under a Satan-produced pseudo perfect

environment, thus eliminating the need for God's Millennial Kingdom under the true Messiah Jesus Christ. He figures it adds to his argument if more people choose him than choose for God, showing he is more popular than God, which in essence is a popularity contest with God. As a part of this copycat strategy to provide a perfect environment on earth, Satan believes he would appear to treat people better than God, giving them a Satan-produced millennial kingdom apart from God so that man would reject God's true Millennial Kingdom. This emphasis on a perfect environment is a current primary focus of Satan's strategy, and will reach its peak during the Tribulation. Therefore the Tribulation starts out as an attempt by Satan to set up a false millennial kingdom, although it will not turn out well. But Satan's focus is to prove God unfair, unloving or a liar so that he just might slip out of his sentence to the Lake of Fire. Satan has memorized the Bible, and he knows how it all ends. But he wants to write a new final chapter. This then provides reason #3 regarding why the Tribulation occurs, namely that the Tribulation is Satan's attempt to set up his own pseudo millennial kingdom with perfect environment and somehow prevent the true Millennial Kingdom of Christ from being accepted by mankind. The Tribulation may start out that way, but it will not end up that way.

If Satan is going to set up a copycat millennial kingdom with a "perfect" environment then he must have a copycat messiah. That is where the Antichrist comes on the scene. It is why this man will be called the Antichrist, since he is set up by Satan instead of and in place of the true Messiah Jesus Christ. Along with that false messiah, Satan will set up a false religion which the Antichrist will lead, which will be a secular religion, meaning one without God or even a god. The seeds have already been sown for this "religion" and it is already the most widespread religion in the world today. It is one which has no deity, but has all the elements of a religious system. It is a zealous approach to life where the guiding principles focus on a misplaced and misguided attempt at betterment of the world rather than following the wishes of the only true God. To the followers of this secular religion there is no God or gods, only a focus on humanistic reforms deemed important to their "righteous cause." In this regard secular religionists seek to replace worship of God with worship of something secular. It can be the earth itself, human progress, equality of man, environmentalism, an ideal brotherhood in which all practice what is "moral and good" as they define these, or a number of other secular causes. These causes are almost always on the side of Satan's interests because they turn the focus away from God and toward human powered distractions, so secular religion ends up supporting Satanic causes and therefore since they support Satan they are by definition opposed to God. They are on Satan's side,

since they support Satan as ruler of the world and his attempts to provide for man's needs apart from God, even though Satan despises people and considers them expendable at any time they become inconvenient to him. But make no mistake, secular religion worships Satan himself, even though the religionists involved will deny such a claim. Such will be the case with the Antichrist and his secular religion, which will be established to bring order out of the chaos which arises after the Rapture of the Church, when no believers remain on the earth.

The Antichrist's secular religion will spread the pseudo gospel of human powered salvation by having "meaning" in life, but meaning apart from God. Since there is no way to enforce such a religion except by force, the Antichrist will undertake the most aggressive accumulation of power in modern history, taking over a large portion of the earth by force. After that he will take over Israel, since Satan seeks to eliminate it from the earth. When he has consolidated power he will make laws which oppress those who do not worship him, instituting the "mark of the beast" program whereby only those who worship him can eat or buy anything. Those who become the new believers in Jesus Christ after the Rapture will be martyred by the many thousands. Satan will gain power in the world like he has never accumulated before, and all through his proxy the Antichrist, who will be possessed by Satan himself. Therefore we see reason #4 regarding why the Tribulation occurs, namely that it will be a time of accumulation of great power by the Antichrist as Satan's proxy, resulting in Satan wielding more power than ever before over the earth.

Secular religion finds it acceptable to hate and even kill those who violate its doctrines. Without God, their religion is one of worshiping the earth as sacrosanct and therefore as a god. Harming the earth is harming its "god" and becomes worthy of death, therefore those who would harm their object of worship are heretics who must be destroyed. Salvation in this secular religion comes by making a difference, such as by saving the planet, whereby environmentalism evangelizes those who are deniers. Global climate change amounts to doing harm to their god. Questioning environmentalism, same sex issues, equality of outcomes, or any "progressive" thinking is called hate, and therefore worthy of the secular religionist's own hatred, punishment, imprisonment, and even death. Secular religion will be at a peak during the Tribulation when the Antichrist will rule much of the earth under the guise of the head of a secular religion where he is its secular savior. This man will be personally indwelt by Satan himself, something which is extremely rare since Satan normally leaves such messy details to his

demons. This secular religion under the Antichrist will lure people in as it promises to save them from global unrest, bring about world peace, heal the earth by stopping global climate change, make all people equal, make no distinction among choices by sex, and provide economic benefit to those who worship this religion. This secular religion will also use copycat tricks to make the Antichrist into a substitute for the true Messiah Jesus Christ, as this man will be viewed at that time as being the secular savior of the world, and even a god, although that is an oxymoron in a secular religion. At the same time anyone who disagrees with the mandates of this secular religion under the Antichrist will be required to either renounce their Christian beliefs or face being cut off from any commerce (mark of the Beast), social estrangement, and in many cases death at either the hands of the secret police or by starvation. This secular religion will tolerate no rivals, and will torture and kill Christians by the thousands, especially those who evangelize others by spreading the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Martyrdom among Christians will therefore reach levels never before seen in history. This is the legacy of secular religion, namely intolerance, hatred, closed-mindedness, degeneracy and mass murder. And it is also doomed to fail to accomplish its own goals since it ignores God's divine laws. Therefore we see reason #5 regarding why the Tribulation occurs, namely that it will be a time of maximum rejection of the true God and Jesus Christ in favor of Satan's Antichrist and his secular false religion, resulting in severe persecution and martyrdom of Christians on a large scale, which brings intense judgments from God. This is what brings on the most intense judgments from God, since this secular religion will seek to wipe out all true believers and the Jews as well, two things which God will not tolerate for long.

Therefore Satan will try to create a society with himself on the throne using the Antichrist and all mankind worshiping him under an idealistic brotherhood of man, where humans practice a form of self righteous morality as Satan defines the terms, although it is in fact an evil society. But it will all fall apart, and quickly. Satan cannot control the evil he sets into motion. Evil people get out of control quickly. Even the Antichrist will revolt against Satan and try to do to Satan what Satan did to God, which is to revolt. This is where Satan gets really ugly. When Satan sees his pseudo-millennial kingdom falling apart, he will change his approach to murdering people by the billions. Satan never cared about any of them anyway, and killing all people, and especially Jews, would make fulfillment of many of God's prophecies impossible. That would enable Satan to win his appeal trial by default, since God would be proven a liar. Satan learns from history as it unfolds. So when he saw God forming a

group of humans called the Jews as His own people to spread the message of salvation and to keep the scriptures, Satan became intensely focused on destroying them. The history of the Jews is one of Satan bringing intense pressure on the Jews to distract them from God's plan, and to generally seek to destroy them. The developing Scriptures, which Satan has carefully read and memorized, showed that the Messiah would come from among the Jews. This became the focus of Satan's plan, namely to wipe out the Jews and prevent the Messiah from being born. And it is interesting to note that Satan believes the Bible. For him it is his intelligence system to try to thwart God's plan. Satan has engaged in numerous attempts to eliminate the Jews, including Egyptian slavery, ancient regimes which conquered the Jews such as Assyria and Babylon, and numerous anti-semitic nations throughout history. All have failed. But Satan is not done with this plan. His best efforts are yet to come, and it will be during the Tribulation when anti-semitism will reach a peak never before seen in history. And during the Tribulation the Jews will lose their blindness about Jesus Christ and become believers in large numbers, making them a double target of Satan. In fact, the Tribulation is a time when the Jews will return to God through faith in Jesus Christ, setting the stage for the Millennial Kingdom to begin, which will have a regathered Israel with Jesus Christ ruling the earth from Jerusalem. This is reason #6 why there will be a Tribulation, so that God can prepare the Jews for populating the Millennial Kingdom with a large number of Jewish believers. Without the Tribulation, the Jews would have continued in their blindness toward Jesus Christ their Savior.

As a result there will be many martyrs among the Jewish believers who profess faith in Christ. By the end of the Tribulation as Satan's strategy and plans fall apart and he finally loses all control, his only remaining plan becomes chaos, evil, and trying to kill all people on the earth and especially all Jews since they are part of Biblical prophecy for the Millennial Kingdom. Satan believes that given enough chaos anything might happen. When the end nears for Satan during the final stages of the Tribulation he will degenerate into what he really is, a liar, a hater, and a mass murderer. His only remaining plan will be destruction and chaos. But even his own fallen angels will instead kill Satan's followers by the hundreds of millions. Satan will lash out in fury and revenge and be shown to be the evil fool he is. He will lose control, and his evil plans will come crashing down to earth in rubble. So this is reason #7 why there will be a Tribulation, that Satan will be highly focused on preventing Bible prophecies from being fulfilled by killing all the Jews, especially Jewish believers. God will not be

pleased by this, to say the least. And with the maximum rejection of God by the general population of the world during the Tribulation, this brings on very intense judgments and Armageddon.

The Tribulation is therefore a time when Satan pulls out all the stops and lashes out in every direction hoping against hope that somehow he can avoid his certain doom. It will all fail, but not before the human race suffers in unimaginable ways, especially those who take the easy route of truth rejection and follow his evil plan. And although it may seem inconceivable, the vast majority of the human race at that time will reject the truth and follow Satan's plan of chaos, hatred, and evil as they approve of killing Christians simply for their belief in Jesus Christ, and line up in agreement with those who punish anyone who does not comply with the evil government of the Antichrist. Truth will be rejected as never before in human history. Right will be called wrong and wrong will be called right. The world will be turned upside down. And it will be enabled, encouraged, and cheered on by the overwhelming majority of people on the earth at that time. They will approve as innocent people are imprisoned and murdered by their governments. Anyone who objects to things the Bible states to be sinful will be declared an enemy of the State. In fact, any form of opposition to the evil government of the Antichrist will be the highest level crime, while ordinary crime will become rampant. Therefore we see reason #8 for the Tribulation, because there will need to be horrible judgments which ultimately end at Armageddon, because the world will be so evil, and the people so irretrievable in hardness of heart.

As a summary of the eight reasons why there will be a Tribulation:

- 1) The Tribulation fulfills the prophecy of Daniel 9 concerning the "seventy sevens" and finishes the Jewish Age, since the prophecy requires seven more years to complete that Age;
- 2) Satan is in his last gasp effort to stay out of the Lake of Fire, and he uses this period of time to make the final arguments of his appeal trial;
- 3) The Tribulation is Satan's attempt to set up his own pseudo millennial kingdom with perfect environment and somehow prevent the true Millennial Kingdom of Christ from being accepted by mankind;
- 4) It will be a time of accumulation of great power by the Antichrist as Satan's proxy, resulting in Satan wielding more power than ever before over the earth;

- 5) There will be maximum rejection of the true God and Jesus Christ in favor of Satan's Antichrist and his secular religion, resulting in persecution and martyrdom of Christians on a large scale, which brings intense judgments from God;
- 6) God will use this time to prepare the Jews for populating the Millennial Kingdom with a large number of Jewish believers. Without the Tribulation, the Jews would continue in their blindness toward Jesus Christ their Savior;
- 7) Satan will be highly focused on preventing Bible prophecies from being fulfilled, and will try to kill all the Jews to accomplish this goal;
- 8) There will need to be horrible judgments which ultimately end at Armageddon because the world will be so evil, and the people so irretrievable in hardness of heart.

Those who reject God in favor of a secular religion seek something which does not exist. They reject the truth, so they must accept the lie. And the only one at the end of that lie is Satan himself, the father of lies and head of all secular religion, which he promotes to fool humans into ignoring God in favor of joining his failed plan of evil. The Tribulation will be a time of great judgments because it is a time of great evil on the earth, and the sponsor of all evil is Satan. Satan's final argument for why he should not be put into the Lake of Fire forever will end with the earth in ruins, maximum human suffering, and billions of unbelievers dead. Not much of an argument in favor of staying out of the Lake of Fire. One would think the future would be very grim at that point, but that is not the way it will turn out. Jesus Christ will return to the earth, heal it from the devastation suffered, institute a perfect environment, and rule for 1000 years. That is the subject of next chapter.

The Kingdom (Millennium)

We have noted how Jesus often discussed "The Kingdom" during His earthly ministry. Many who read the Bible misinterpret this to be some kingdom of believers in a general sense, but that is not accurate. It is a specific reference to the literal 1000 year Age when Christ will rule the earth from Jerusalem, and it will be an Age of perfect environment and extended lifetimes. And it will be the last Age of human history, after which only eternity remains.

As a short review, Jesus' earthly ministry included two main items He was sent to offer, first salvation, and secondly the Millennial Kingdom. Jesus taught about the Kingdom in nearly everything He preached publicly to the masses, and also to the disciples in private, and He made a legitimate offer to institute the Millennial Kingdom to the Jews during His day. But the Jewish leadership rejected the offer, and they had Jesus Christ crucified instead. Therefore the Millennial Kingdom was delayed, and the Church Age was inserted instead, which was the "mystery Age" never before revealed, not even by Jesus during His entire earthly ministry.

The earth will undergo significant changes during the destructive judgments of the Tribulation, as mountains will fall, islands will explode and vanish, and so on. The current earth will continue during the Millennium but will be changed. Jesus Christ will heal the earth when He institutes perfect environment, so the destruction which occurs during the Tribulation will be overcome by His transformations. Satan and his demons will no longer be able to tempt mankind since they will all be in prison during the Millennium awaiting their final judgment. There will be no war and minimal crime, and death will be very rare as people's bodies will no longer wear out with age, and there will be no diseases. But although the earth will be changed, it will still be the same earth we now live on. It will still have 1000 years of usefulness remaining at that point, then human history will end and the entire universe will be destroyed. Therefore human history will start and end with perfect environment, starting with the Garden of Eden, and ending with the perfect environment of the Millennium.

The Old Testament has quite a lot to say about the Millennium and provides many more details than the New Testament. That is because it is a fulfillment of promises made to ancient Israel. But the New

Testament reiterates that it must occur, such as in Revelation 20:1-4:

"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. ⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

There are several purposes for the Millennium in God's plan. One of the main purposes is to show that perfect environment is not the solution to man's sinful nature or problems. The only answer is salvation through Jesus Christ and study of the Word of God, which leads to living the spiritual life God provides for us no matter the environment or other conditions. During the Millennium people will still have the same sinful nature as all who came before them, and perfect environment will not make them any better as people. They will still be sinners with plenty of personal problems and many will reject Jesus Christ as Savior even though He is on earth with them. There will be millions of unbelievers on earth by the end of the Millennium, and they will join with Satan during his final revolt when he is briefly released from prison. This shows how faith in Christ and learning God's Word to enable living the spiritual life will still be the only true solution, both eternally and temporally.

Another primary purpose of the Millennium is to fulfill the promises God made to the Jews in Old Testament times, since the Millennium is included in numerous prophecies. History cannot end until all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled. The Millennial Kingdom was what the disciples expected Jesus Christ to institute when He started His ministry on earth during His First Advent. That is why they continually discussed "the Kingdom", referring to the Millennium. They initially did not understand that Christ's salvation work for mankind had to occur first, and only truly understood this issue after the

crucifixion had occurred and the Holy Spirit revealed it all to them. As previously noted, Jesus made a legitimate offer of the Kingdom (Millennium) during His First Advent but He was rejected as the King of the Jews. The insertion of the Church Age split the Jewish Age into two parts, the Old Testament period from Abraham to just after the Cross, and then the Tribulation which completes the Jewish Age. Of course this was God's Plan all along knowing the rejection of Christ would occur. This insertion of the Church Age happened seven years before the Jewish Age was prophesied to end (Daniel 9:24-27), which is why the Tribulation is necessary to complete the last seven years of the Jewish Age. Once the Tribulation completes the Jewish Age the Millennium can begin. Therefore the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Millennium were delayed, so they must still be fulfilled in the future. More details about such issues are included in my book "The Future Times" which can be obtained free online if more information is desired.

The Millennium is a regathering and restoration of Israel with Jesus Christ established as the King of Israel under a Theocracy (rule by God). The Jews had rejected the previous Theocracy rule during Old Testament times when they demanded a human king like other nations, and Saul became king of Israel against the will of God (1 Samuel 8:6-8). God promised that Abraham's descendants would own a very large portion of the Middle East, an area much larger than has ever been known as Israel, and the Messiah as a descendant of David would be King over this expanded Israel. God also established a New Covenant to Israel which will be fulfilled in the Millennium:

Jeremiah 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.""

There will be a new covenant to Israel during the Millennium, just as a new covenant (New Testament) was provided for the Church Age. Jesus Christ as the Ruler of Israel will directly provide this new covenant information about the spiritual life and how it must be lived during that 1000 year Age. All who want to know the new covenant doctrines will receive them easily and directly. No more will there be a long process of learning Bible information as we during the Church Age are required to do,

but then the Church Age believers are rewarded for that learning and growing process, so it is not a negative for us. There will be a new temple in Jerusalem, and animal sacrifices will be offered once again in Israel, but as a memorial to the cross, not like Old Testament times when they taught about the future Messiah. (Ezekiel 43:18-27) Restored Israel will once again become the chief evangelizers to the people of the earth. Even though Christ is present as their ruler on the earth, the people born during the Millennium will still need to be evangelized, and many will refuse to accept the salvation plan of God. People at that time must believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, not just as their ruler, to have salvation and eternal life. But many will be distracted by the perfect environment and think they need nothing else, and will remain unbelievers. This is part of what the Millennium is intended to demonstrate in human history.

The Jews will have lived “in exile” scattered among the various nations for thousands of years until the Millennium begins. The existence of a nation called Israel today has nothing to do with the supernatural regathering of every single Jew (as Ezekiel said “not leaving any behind”) into a nation ruled by Jesus Christ Himself during the Millennium. There are many more Jews scattered today than living in the current nation of Israel. And simply being Jewish without having believed in Jesus Christ as Savior has no standing with God. Ezekiel 39 provides a good summary of the Millennium as related to the regathering of Israel:

Ezekiel 39:25 “Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will now restore the fortunes of Jacob and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name. ²⁶ They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. ²⁷ When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will be proved holy through them in the sight of many nations. ²⁸ Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. ²⁹ I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

During the Millennium the remainder of the earth will be populated by gentile nations, also ruled by Jesus Christ from Jerusalem. Believers from Old Testament times, the Church Age, and the Tribulation who had previously died will return in their eternal resurrection bodies with Christ at the Second Advent, and these believers will serve Him during the Millennium as rulers of cities and nations, as judges, as priests and will serve the King of kings in many other leadership positions. So on the earth will be the Lord Himself, believers in resurrection bodies who had previously lived on the earth, believers in natural bodies who survived the Tribulation, and people who will be born during the Millennium. There will even be angels (elect only) living on the earth who will be visible at that time. Needless to say, it will be an unusual time.

As already mentioned, the land which will belong to Israel during the Millennium will be much larger than the current size of Israel as a fulfillment of the following promises to Abraham:

Genesis 13:14 “The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. ¹⁷ Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

Genesis 15:18 “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

Genesis 17:7 “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

The Millennium will also fulfill the promises to David that his descendant (Jesus Christ as the Son of David) would rule forever beginning in the Millennium and during the Eternal State.

2 Samuel 7:6 “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”

Psalm 89:3 “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, 4 ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.’”

Isaiah and Zechariah prophesied how Jerusalem will be the most important city during the Millennium, since the Lord will rule over the entire earth from there:

Isaiah 2:2 “In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

Zechariah 14:10 “The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah [a low flat plain]. But Jerusalem will be raised up high [Jerusalem will become a much higher plateau] from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses, and will remain in its place. 11 It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure [safe during the entire Millennium].”

Jerusalem will be “raised up high” from its current height while the countryside all around it, which is currently quite hilly, shall be made level like the Arabah, a low plain. Present day Jerusalem is about 2500 feet above sea level, and some hills around it are higher. The Millennial elevation changes will make the approach to the city on a high mountain where Christ rules a spectacular sight for those who approach His city.

Isaiah 40:4 “Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground

shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.”

We see that Jerusalem will be the highest point on the earth as “the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.” The earth will be much flatter, as the Tribulation earthquakes will have caused the mountains to fall into the valleys. The remaining elevated areas are now called “hills” by Isaiah, with none as high as Jerusalem. Recall the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem, which is currently higher than the city, will be split in half by the Lord at the Second Advent and will become much shorter. According to Ezekiel 48 the size of the Millennial Jerusalem will be approximately seven miles square. The Lord will rule from Jerusalem, so the city will be elevated physically, spiritually, and in importance in the eyes of all the Lord's subjects throughout the entire earth.

Ezekiel Chapters 40 – 43 provide a detailed blueprint for the Millennium temple, which will be built before the start of the Millennium by the Lord Himself. The Tribulation temple will be destroyed by the earthquake which splits the Mount of Olives during the Second Advent of Christ. The new Millennial temple will be the throne of Jesus Christ:

Ezekiel 43:6 “While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. ⁷ He said: “Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.”

Offerings at the Millennium temple will be in memory of the salvation sacrifice of Jesus Christ, not looking forward to the sacrifice of Christ as with the Old Testament sacrifices. The martyrs of the Tribulation will serve as priests, along with the Levitical priesthood which had been set aside after the cross. (Ezekiel 43:19)

The Millennium will be a time of universal peace on the earth:

Isa 2:4 “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

There will be no more war, but there will be plenty of disputes among people and nations since mankind remains sinful and therefore no better than during any other period of time. There would be war except that the Lord will not allow it. He will rule with an iron scepter, so it will not simply be everyone getting along just fine without firm leadership. Remember, perfect environment does not make people any better as people. Jesus Christ will strongly enforce the rule of law. As such there will be no war, and almost no crime.

The Prophet Micah echoes the statements of Isaiah:

Micah 4:1 “In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains [no mountain on earth higher than Jerusalem]; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. ² Many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³ He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁴ Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.”

Believers from all the Ages who are in their eternal resurrection bodies during the Millennium will be on the earth as rulers of the nations, and will serve in other positions of leadership in the Lord's rulership hierarchy such as governors, judges and administrators. Jewish believers will generally have leadership over Israel, and gentile believers will generally have leadership over gentile nations, but that may not be a firm distinction. David will be a Chief Prince. The disciples who became apostles to the Church (plus Paul), who were all Jews, will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel:

Matthew 19:28 “Jesus said to them [disciples], “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Luke 22:29 “And I confer on you [disciples] a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom [Millennium] and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

1 Corinthians 6:2 “Or do you not know that the Lord’s people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels?”

Resurrected gentile believers who were spiritual winners during their previous time on earth, including from the Church Age, will rule generally throughout the rest of the earth. It is interesting to think about how there will be many millions of believers on earth who are in their eternal resurrection bodies, having previously lived out their lives during earlier Ages of time.

Isaiah 11:3 “He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.”

In the very, very rare case where a capital crime is committed, the Lord Himself will judge and execute the person very quickly with perfect fairness. We often think of perfect environment as solving the world's problems, but the Millennium will prove this to be wrong. Only the strong rule of the Lord will enable this perfect environment among imperfect humans.

Isaiah 11:6 “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near

the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

The curse put on the earth after the fall of Adam will be lifted. Both animal and plant life will be friendly to mankind. There will be no wild animals, and they will not eat each other. There will be no more thorns or dangerous plants. Nature will become very tame, and the earth will be fruitful and will easily give up its bounty. Therefore there will be no hunger or poverty during the Millennium. But people will still work to earn a living.

Micah 4:4 "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken."

Zechariah 3:10 "Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. ¹¹ "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. ¹² The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem."

Jesus Christ will cause Israel to be the preeminent nation during the Millennium and will rule from Jerusalem. Other nations will look to Israel as the most favored of nations. The Lord will be present among the people and those who are believers will have the benefit of knowing Him as their resurrected Savior while they are still on the earth.

Zechariah 14:8 "On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter [Second Advent earthquake forms a new valley]. ⁹ The LORD will be king over the whole earth [Millennium]. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name."

Ezekiel 47:1 “The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar....⁸ He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. ⁹ Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. ¹⁰ Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets.”

Splitting the Mount of Olives creates a new river flowing both east and west from Jerusalem. It will flow east to the Mediterranean Sea, and west to the Dead Sea and on to the Red Sea. The resulting waterways will make Jerusalem a major seaport, connecting Jerusalem to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean creating a significant new trade route for international commerce. Jerusalem will become the most important and prosperous city on earth during the Millennium, and a center of trade as well as the world's capital city. Although the Dead Sea water currently does not support life since it is 34% salinity, the water flow from the temple mount into the Dead Sea freshens it during the Millennium, and will turn southern Israel into a paradise of great beauty and bounty for farming and will create great fishing and provide other pleasure purposes. We also see that although all the fish of the oceans and seas were killed during the Tribulation, the fish are back in abundance in the Millennium as a result of the Lord healing the earth. It is also important to note that although there will be perfect environment on the earth, all people will still need to work for a living. The Lord does not promote idleness under perfect environment, since even at that time it would encourage misbehavior.

Zechariah 14:16 “Then the survivors [believers from gentile nations] from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem [during the Tribulation] will go up year after year [during the Millennium] to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁷ If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain. ¹⁸ If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁹ This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not

go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. 20 On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. 21 Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite [idolaters] in the house of the LORD Almighty.”

This passage is instructive in showing how after the initial believers begin the Millennium, many of their descendants born during the Millennium will not become believers. Some of those will not want to pay their respects to honor the Lord's deliverance of His people. Even in perfect environment, the Lord can and will withhold blessings to those who refuse to obey Him. This shows the "iron hand" of the Lord as He enforces law, order and proper respect for His rule. Even under the perfect ruler and in perfect environment people would still resort to crime, war and other unsavory actions, which shows the true nature of mankind apart from salvation and the Word of God in the soul and spirit. But obedient unbelievers will benefit materially and have many blessings in the perfect environment of the Millennium as long as they otherwise obey the Lord's laws and policies.

There are also some interesting miscellaneous facts about the Millennium. David will be the Chief Prince ruling alongside Jesus Christ. He will have his own section of Jerusalem allotted to him. David will be the only one allowed to eat in the presence of the Lord inside the temple. Ezekiel 44:3 “The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the LORD.” This reminds of when King David and his men were very hungry and ate the bread from the tabernacle which had been presented as an offering to the Lord, something generally forbidden. 1 Samuel 21:3 “So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.”

In summary of what the Millennium will be like, it is "the Kingdom" which Christ will rule for 1000 years, with His throne located in Jerusalem. It will be a time of perfect environment on the earth. All Jews will be regathered into a much larger nation of Israel. Jerusalem will be raised up as a mountain

higher than any other on earth. We see that after the Tribulation the Lord will heal the earth since it will be in terrible shape. The destruction which occurred will be repaired, and the earth will also be changed such as the flattening of mountains, few islands and so forth. Satan and fallen angels will not be on the earth to try to influence man and world events. Humans in resurrection bodies will be on the earth as rulers over the humans who are living out their natural lives. Elect angels will also live on the earth. Plant life will be restored and also tamed. Animals will no longer be wild or eat each other. The seas and sea life will be restored and will thrive. The sun and moon, afflicted during the Tribulation, will be made whole again. Barren land and deserts will bloom. The earth will be very friendly to mankind and will easily provide much bounty. But humans will still be as they have always been since the fall of Adam, sinful and no better than ever, and in need of salvation through Jesus Christ and needing spiritual understanding to solve their individual problems.

After the Millennium is complete, all humans will be removed from the earth into their eternal status, then the current earth and universe will be destroyed. A new earth and new universe suited for the resurrection bodies of all believers of all time will be created, and all believers will live with God as Trinity in this new universe forever.

Why Must Unbelievers Spend Eternity in the Lake of Fire?

One of the most heart-wrenching issues about God's plan is that most people who ever live will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. This will include many very nice people from the human viewpoint. They will be people who just live out their lives quietly and do not seem to do any harm, people who are not especially sinful, people who are nice neighbors, people who donate money to worthy causes, people who are just ordinary or maybe even extraordinary in some ways. Some will even be heroes, lifesavers, hospital builders, humanitarians, and people who do many forms of good deeds. It is a terrible thing to contemplate their eternal fate. Why must such people spend eternity in absolute misery? Why can't God simply accept that they are "good" people?

The simple answer is God cannot associate with anyone who has not complied with His requirement to accept the salvation He has offered in grace through Jesus Christ, because only salvation makes a person acceptable to God. God went to great lengths to provide a way of salvation, and it is the only way. Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) Jesus was not being allegorical, or boastful, or speaking in hyperbole, or rambling on for no purpose. God's plan required extreme effort to provide a way of salvation for sinful mankind, and God Himself as Trinity suffered greatly in the process. God cannot ignore His own perfection, that He is perfect righteousness and perfect justice. God demands perfect righteousness, not some form of relative righteousness, and no matter how good someone might appear to be it is never good enough to meet God's perfect standards. Therefore salvation is accepting what Christ has done for us to make us acceptable to God. First, Jesus Christ removed the sin issue as a barrier to salvation since He paid in full the penalty due for all sins of mankind. No one will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire because of sins, because that issue was removed entirely by Jesus Christ. But the second issue is what results in condemnation, namely to live with God forever requires perfect righteousness, and that is not gained based on one's own merits or good works. Jesus Christ made it possible to claim His own righteousness as the basis of a relationship with God, which is rejecting our inadequate righteousness and instead claiming the perfect righteousness of Christ. Romans 3:10 says "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." And 2 Corinthians 5:21 says "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Therefore, accepting the salvation work of Jesus Christ is accepting two issues, namely that He paid the penalty for our sins, and also that He

provides us with His own righteousness in place of our own works. Anything else falls short. There are no relative standards, since that would never meet God's perfect standards. There is no "good enough" or "not as sinful" or "did wonderful deeds" or "a very nice person" or any other relative standard by which mankind evaluates people. There is only one way which is acceptable to God, and it is absolute and eternal. John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." The difference regarding eternal status is not a relative standard, but rather a matter of faith in Jesus Christ vs. rejection of Jesus Christ. It is that simple, and eternal in impact.

God has made the issue of salvation vs. condemnation clear through His Word revealed to mankind. Eternal condemnation is a choice, just as salvation is a choice, and they are the only two options each individual has. People live and die on earth for one main reason, namely to either accept or reject the salvation God has offered. It is a simple choice. The purpose of human existence is not to prove how good or bad they are, but rather to make a choice for or against God's salvation plan, which has only one way of salvation. Many very nice people throughout history will reject God's plan and be condemned, and many not so nice people will accept it and be saved. Every human is born condemned by God as a descendant of Adam, because Adam's sin is passed down to us all as a sinful nature. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22) The first sin does not condemn us, but rather we are born condemned, and then all sin as a result of their sinful nature. Therefore no relative goodness, or minimal sinfulness, can save anyone.

One of the most often asked questions about unbelievers is "What about those who have never heard the gospel?" The answer starts with the fact that God is fair, and that He desires every person to be saved. From this alone we know that God handles the issue. Although that should be enough, there is more to the answer than that. There are two levels to a person in an isolated location hearing the gospel. The first level is a desire to know God, then after that gospel hearing. If any person ever expresses a desire to know God, then God is required to provide the gospel information to that person, no matter how remote they are. The gospel has made its way into remote regions during the entirety of

human history, although much of it has not been documented. A second aspect of the question about never hearing the gospel is answered by how God distributes human souls at birth. God creates all souls, and puts them into human bodies at the point of birth. God is omniscient, so He knows which souls will ultimately seek Him and desire the gospel and salvation. Therefore God has put the souls where they belong at birth, with the ones who will seek Him put mainly into places where the gospel is available, and those who will ultimately reject Him often go into the remote places where they will not hear the gospel anyway. A third aspect is that children who die in remote locations are automatically saved, since a person must achieve the point of accountability in order to make a salvation decision. If that point is not reached, the child (or very low mentality person) who dies will represent that remote region in eternity.

God keeps a registry of salvation called the Book of Life. The names of those who have accepted God's salvation will be in the Book of Life at the end of human history, and the names of those who did not accept God's salvation will not be found. If the salvation work of Christ is rejected, the person relies on their own merit and deeds, which are never good enough to achieve the perfect righteousness demanded by God. This is why there is another set of books called the "Books of Works" which are used to condemn each unbeliever at the Last Judgment. Each unbeliever will be condemned because their own works fell far short of the perfect righteousness which only Jesus Christ could have shared with them, if they had only believed in Him. Revelation 20:12 says: "I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books." Only the names of believers will be in the Book of Life, but unbelievers will only have their names and deeds recorded in the other books, referred to as the books of works, by which they will be judged. Note they are not judged for their individual sins, but for their lack of perfect righteousness which they sought to achieve through their own good works and efforts apart from God's salvation offer. This is why all those who rejected the salvation offer from God, people who just live out their lives quietly and did not seem to do any harm, people who were not especially sinful, people who were nice neighbors, people who donated money to worthy causes, people who were just ordinary or maybe even extraordinary in some ways, and the heroes, lifesavers, hospital builders, humanitarians, and people who did many forms of good deeds, will all spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. They were not perfectly righteous, just very good people. On the other hand, there will be many people who were sinful, unlikeable, nasty people who

accepted salvation because they knew what they were, and accepted the righteousness of God instead of their own unrighteousness. That is God's fairness, because every single person has a choice to make, and Jesus Christ did all the work for salvation, meaning no one could ever work their way into heaven.

God did not send His Son Jesus Christ to the cross to bear the punishment for all mankind just to later say "just kidding...everyone is welcome in heaven". If that were true then Jesus Christ suffered and bore the sins of all mankind for no reason, and the whole plan of God has been without a purpose. But God does not lie, or tell mankind one thing but mean another. He provided a means of salvation in the only way possible, namely through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The Bible is clear that salvation is a choice, and that each person must decide to accept or reject the salvation God has provided at great cost to Him. It was the only way God could provide salvation to any of us. Those who reject the offer cannot ever have any connection to God, either while alive or during eternity. And those who accept the offer will live with Him for all eternity, regardless of what else they do or don't do during their lives. This one decision divides the human race into two distinct categories, one group will spend eternity with God, and the other will spend eternity in horrible punishment. There are no other options, and there is no crossing over after death occurs. The division is eternal and unchangeable.

Some will ask "How can a loving God condemn some of His creation to eternal punishment?" That is what Satan asked after he was condemned. In fact, that question from Satan is why mankind was created. Satan appealed his sentence to the Lake of Fire, resulting in God allowing an appeal trial which resulted in the creation of man. As we have discussed previously, mankind is now playing out the appeal trial of Satan, proving that God is indeed loving and fair to condemn Satan and all fallen angels to the Lake of Fire. Since unbeliever humans choose the side of Satan, they reject God and are caught up with Satan in his appeal trial, so God is loving and fair to condemn unbeliever humans to the Lake of Fire along with Satan and the fallen angels. He certainly does not want to see any reject His salvation offer, but God has provided everyone with the opportunity to avoid condemnation.

Many will still ask "why eternity, why not just a shorter time period?" First, God cannot destroy souls once they have been created by Him, so each soul must live forever. Secondly, all who live with God during eternity must be as good as God is, meaning perfect righteousness during eternity. Believers achieve this by accepting the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ, not by being relatively good

people. Similarly, no unbeliever can "work off" sins after death to become more acceptable to God because that is still a relative righteousness approach, and since the sin issue was completely resolved by Jesus Christ, personal sin is not the issue in the eternal condemnation of unbelievers. Unbelievers are condemned because they reject the salvation work of Jesus Christ, not because they had more heinous sins or sinned more often during their lifetime. For the same reason, unbelievers who do many good deeds and sin very little cannot ever achieve salvation apart from Jesus Christ. Additionally, unbelievers have a soul but no human spirit, and no amount of good deeds or lack of sin can gain one. A human spirit is required to be a "spiritual being" and without one there is no way to interact with God. A human spirit is part of the salvation package, and cannot be gained any way except through faith in Christ as Savior. God cannot have any contact during eternity with any person who does not have a human spirit.

There is only one way to live with God for all eternity since it is the only way acceptable to God, and is based on one decision which each person must make. It is the reason each person lives on the earth, namely to make a decision either for or against Jesus Christ as Savior. It is also a free gift which cannot be earned. It is grace. Ephesians 2: 8 says: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast." Refusing the ultimate gift from God Himself is the singular reason for eternal condemnation. Those who spend eternity in condemnation will do so because they rejected a grace gift which was personally handed to them by God, but they pushed it back in His face. Condemnation is a choice, just as salvation is a choice. Earning and deserving have no place in God's plan. Neither salvation nor eternal condemnation are earned or deserved, they are chosen.

God cannot ignore His own perfect essence. If He could ignore His perfect righteousness in favor of His perfect love, He would not have perfect righteousness and therefore would not be God. God did not reject any unbeliever, each one individually rejected God, and each one of them must live with that rejection forever.

What Eternity Will Be Like

Eternity is a complex subject. There are interim states before the eventual permanent states, plus there are four categories of creatures with souls who will have different states along the way, then there will be two permanent states for the remainder of eternity. And no souled creature is in their final state at this point, even if currently residing in heaven or in hell. To truly understand the subject of eternity one must understand all of these issues. And the Bible spreads the information out in rather small pieces, making it harder to pull together. But since you have made it to this point in the book, you know we can persevere and explain eternity in a way it can be understood. For those who quit reading several chapters back, too bad. They will miss out.

The first thing to understand about eternity is that the soul will be the same soul, meaning the person will be the same person during eternity, although believers will shed the sinful nature at death which will be a major improvement. The soul has self-consciousness, and the heart and other components will function as they did during the lifetime, therefore the person will know they are the same person who lived on earth. If you think about yourself now while reading this, and think about how you know you exist, this is the same way you will be able to think in eternity. The reason for bringing this up is that many seem to think they will be completely different and in some endless daze during eternity, and not be the same person as when on earth. Death transfers the soul, but does not alter it except that believers will lose their sinful nature, therefore the soul is improved, freeing it from all the negative thinking processes which held us back while on earth. And that soul will be in a greatly improved body, giving it much greater thinking ability, so everyone will be smarter, better looking, and so on. But the soul itself will be the same, so it is important to start with understanding the soul is the real person, and that it continues forever.

God created two categories of souled creatures, first angels, and then humans. Every single person in all human history and every single angel in all angelic history will live forever throughout eternity. No souled creature will ever simply cease to exist. The issue for each individual creature is whether eternity will be spent with God or apart from Him, which are the only two possible eternal end states. And eternal status affects both location and body type. As we discussed previously, human and angel

souls are exactly the same, just in different types of bodies. Elect angels have both soul and spirit, while Satan and fallen angels have only a soul without a spirit since they lost the spirit at their fall when they revolted against God. Therefore fallen angels are spiritually dead and cannot have a relationship with God, either now or during the Eternal State, so their eternity must be spent apart from God just as with unbeliever humans who also have no spirit. The reason angels and humans have the exact same soul, and spirit for elect angels and human believers, but in different body types is because mankind was created to resolve the appeal trial of Satan and his fallen angels. And the only fair way to do it was by having the exact same immaterial components in both humans and angels so the decision making capabilities would be the same. But in eternity the body types for elect angels and human believers will be "reversed". More on that issue later.

The subject of eternity is further complicated by what happens while human history continues, and what happens after human history is completed, since there are both temporary and permanent conditions. Most people think that once a person dies they go into their permanent eternal status. That has not been true for any human being so far. The death of a person does not result in the immediate transfer into a permanent status, either for believers or unbelievers. Therefore at the point of death each person enters into a temporary eternal status until the final Eternal State occurs after human history is complete. And no angel has ever died, therefore none are currently in their eternal status. So the issue is rather complex since a discussion about eternity must include four categories of creatures under several sets of conditions which includes temporary and permanent statuses. And it is an understatement to say eternity will be very different depending on which category the creature is in.

Therefore to begin to unravel the issue of eternity it must be divided into the four categories of souled creatures which have an eternal status, then we can discuss for each category what has happened so far, what will happen during the remainder of history, and what happens after history is completed when the Eternal State begins. The four categories of souled creatures are:

1) Elect angels: Those angels who refused to join Satan's revolt against God. These angels remained loyal to God and therefore remained in the status of being able to spend eternity with God. 2/3 of all angels remained as elect angels.

2) Satan and fallen angels: Includes Satan and those angels who joined Satan's revolt against God.

These angels sinned and therefore lost the status of being able to spend eternity with God. 1/3 of all angels revolted and became fallen angels.

3) Saved humans (aka believers in Jesus Christ): Those who accepted salvation from God even though unworthy, which qualifies them to live with God forever.

4) Unserved humans (aka unbelievers who reject Jesus Christ): Those who rejected salvation from God, leaving them unqualified to live with God forever.

We have previously discussed Satan's fall so that will not be repeated here, but a brief review of how angels got separated into two groups helps understand the overall subject of eternity for angels.

Satan was the most favored angel in Heaven for a very long time, maybe thousands or even millions of years. He was created by God to be the best looking, smartest, most likable angel of all. He was very close to God and had the best of everything available to him. At some point Satan became arrogant and wished to have more authority than God allowed, so he led a revolt against God. Satan's original coup attempt occurred long before the creation of man when he revolted against God and declared "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars [angels] of God...I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). Satan and the other fallen angels battled God and His elect angels, and of course Satan's side lost. A trial occurred in Heaven, and Satan and all fallen angels were judged guilty and sentenced to the Lake of Fire before mankind ever existed. We can surmise from what the Bible says about associated issues that Satan objected to his punishment by saying an eternity in the Lake of Fire was unfair, and not what a loving God would do. As a result God allowed an appeal trial, and this is where mankind entered the picture. God created one man and one woman and placed them on earth to start the process to resolve the issue of God's fairness. When man eventually sinned, following a similar pattern of Satan's sin, God provided salvation through Jesus Christ proving God's love and fairness to unworthy mankind. Mankind was allowed to expand to provide a broader test to further disprove Satan's assertions about God being unfair. Man's role was then to accept the gracious gift of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ the Savior, showing Satan that God is not only perfect righteousness and justice, but also perfect love and completely fair. These combined traits can legitimately put Satan and all fallen angels into the Lake of Fire as punishment due to the finality of their rejection of God. This sentence will be carried out after human history has ended when Satan and

all fallen angels will be put into the Lake of Fire. This also shows how human history is tied directly to the angelic conflict. And unbelieving humans will eventually be put into the Lake of Fire since they joined Satan's side by rejecting God, but not until they are all finally judged at the end of human history. In the meantime the ancient angelic conflict continues, with Satan attempting by any means to avoid his ultimate fate in the Lake of Fire which has already been decreed. And contrary to popular belief, Satan has never been to hell, and he certainly does not rule over it. Hell (Torments) is a temporary holding cell for human unbelievers until they are judged at the end of history, and it is not meant to house angels.

Although Satan and all fallen angels have already been judged guilty and sentenced to the Lake of Fire, they are obviously not in their eternal status. Neither are human unbelievers, who have not yet been judged, therefore dead unbelievers are in the temporary prison called hell awaiting their final judgment. The appeal trial of Satan must play out before both fallen angels and unbelievers are all put into the Lake of Fire as their eternal status.

With this background of the angelic conflict in mind, we will now begin to discuss the eternal status of each of the four groups in order, one at a time.

Elect Angels

Elect angels never sinned so did not require reconciliation with God. They remained loyal to God, therefore defining their eternal state is not as complicated. During the pre-mankind portion of the angelic conflict there were battles between the elect and fallen angels over a long period of time, and elect angels earned certain rewards for their actions. These rewards were granted at some time before the creation of man, and it included certain body changes such as the number of wings, level of power, and other undefined rewards and honors. These rewards made some of the elect angels into six winged Seraphs (plural Seraphim) which became more powerful than Satan, who was formerly the most powerful of all angels as a four winged Cherub (plural Cherubim). So for elect angels their body type has been locked into final form, which is the only finality of any type for any of the four creature types. But the elect angels are not in their final eternal state location, even though they are currently in heaven, or in and out of heaven. This is where we learn that heaven will not be the eternal location of

any creature. The location of their eternity will change in the future, as their location will be linked with human believers, which will be discussed later. Meanwhile, they currently reside in heaven and on the earth where they worship God, support believers, oppose fallen angels, and have functions which change during the various Ages of human history.

Fallen Angels

This group is much more complicated. God has already sentenced Satan and all fallen angels to the Lake of Fire for revolting against Him, a place designed specifically for them (Matthew 25:41, John 16:11). But none of them are there now since God is currently allowing them to make the argument that they should never be sent there. In fact, the Lake of Fire is empty at this time. The Lake of Fire is not the same as what is commonly called Hell (Torments) where human unbelievers are now temporarily held. After human history ends, Hell will be eliminated and Satan, fallen angels, and unbelieving man will reside forever in the Lake of Fire.

Fallen angels are currently in several places, but none are in their eternal status. Several groups of apparently millions of angels are in underground prisons deep in the earth, a result of disobeying God's rules for the angelic conflict. Satan's appeal trial must be accomplished within the rules established by God, and serious cheating is punished by imprisonment. The reason is not given for most of the fallen angels being in prisons, but they committed prohibited acts which resulted in imprisonment. They will all be released during the Tribulation for a short time, only to be re-imprisoned at the end of that period.

Those fallen angels who are not imprisoned roam the universe, mostly staying on earth, and sometimes they reside in heaven. It may seem odd that God would allow fallen angels into heaven, but Satan spends a lot of time there since he likes it better than the earth. But he also roams the earth looking for ways to gain an edge in the angelic conflict. Job 1:7 says: "The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it."

Fallen angels will enter their eternal status after the end of human history. The end of history will conclude Satan's allotted time to make his appeal trial arguments about God's fairness. When human

history ends, Satan and all fallen angels will be put into the eternal Lake of Fire since they will have failed to prove their claim that God was unfair to sentence them to the Lake of Fire forever.

During eternity all fallen angels and human unbelievers will be put into eternal bodies of condemnation, and they will all be equal; even Satan will be no better off than any human unbeliever in the Lake of Fire. As noted earlier, Satan does not rule Hell, but rather will simply be one more tortured soul in a lowly body in the most awful place imaginable in total misery for all eternity. There is equality of suffering in the Lake of Fire, and it is forever.

Humans Overview

The human race is divided into two groups in God's view, namely believers (saved) and unbelievers (unsaved). Believers are those who at some time during their life on earth believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior. That is all it takes. God makes it easy to accept His grace so no one will have any excuse for rejecting salvation. (Those who die too young to make a decision about Christ, and those with very low mental capacity who cannot make an informed decision are treated the same as believers.)

Believers have a human spirit, while unbelievers lack a human spirit which is only gained at salvation. A human spirit is required to have a relationship with God, both during the person's lifetime and in eternity. Therefore unbelievers must spend eternity apart from God. We will now look at the two groups of humans, and how their eternity will play out.

Unsaved Human Unbelievers

Unbelievers are dealt with in stages after death. First they go to a temporary holding facility commonly called "Hell" or "Hades" but more correctly known as Torments. We will not fight common terminology, so will use the word Hell. Every unbeliever who has ever died is currently in Hell awaiting the end of human history when they will be judged. Hell is a very uncomfortable place and is characterized by torment from extreme heat and lack of respite from it. Luke 16:23-24: "In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water

and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.” Of course the request was rejected. But this gives us a glimpse into the current Hell. The eternal Lake of Fire will be much worse.

After human history is complete, the current earth and universe will be destroyed, and all unbelievers in Hell will be brought out and taken before Jesus Christ to receive their final judgment. This “second resurrection” of all unbelievers of all time occurs as a single event after the Millennium is completed, and is called the Great White Throne Judgment. After the Millennium ends human history is complete, and all unbelievers from all time are taken out of Hell and assembled in Heaven for judgment. The earth and universe are now empty of mankind and angels, and since that universe is no longer needed it is destroyed. This is a literal and complete destruction whereby the very elements of the entire universe including all atoms are unzipped in a single flash and cease to exist forever. 2 Peter 3:10 says: “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.” The earth, every star, every planet, every atom will vanish in an instant. History is complete, and the final remaining action is to judge all unbelievers of all time, then the Eternal State can commence.

Rev 20:11 says: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

All unbelievers of all time are judged individually and personally by Jesus Christ. They refused to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and accept His salvation work on the cross, and instead they relied on their own “good works” during human history for salvation. But every unbeliever is found to have come short of achieving the required perfect righteousness necessary to live with God, since perfect righteousness is only available through faith in Jesus Christ, and only through faith in Jesus Christ can anyone be given a human spirit. Every unbeliever is therefore guilty of imperfection and thrown into

the eternal Lake of Fire alongside Satan and his demons. They will all be equal. Satan will not rule in the Lake of Fire, but will be just like the most insignificant unbeliever there – he is nobody special, and is tortured forever just like all the human unbelievers.

All will be put into common lowly bodies, both man and angel, which makes them all equal in suffering. Satan will not rule humans in the Lake of Fire. Their eternal body will not be very functional except that it is maximized for pain. All people during their life on earth have a sinful nature. When a believer dies that sinful nature is shed, but when the unbeliever dies it is not shed, but is retained forever, which adds to the torment due to the anger, bitterness, remorse, and other negative thought processes. So also with fallen angels and their sinful nature. While elect angels never took on a sinful nature, the fallen angels did and will retain it forever. Not only will they be in agony, they will also be bitter, resentful, remorseful, and have all the other negative thoughts which intensify their misery and suffering. The Lake of Fire is described as burning sulfur, a picture of intense torment. Although one might think this fiery place would have light, it is absolute darkness since all light in eternity is only from God's glory and through Jesus Christ, and only for His own people. Therefore the Lake of Fire is totally dark, intensely hot and horribly painful. There will be no respite from the suffering. God can have nothing to do with any of them forever.

Most of what people think about Hell comes from the writer Dante and his poem “Divine Comedy”. Just to be clear, Dante is not a book in the Bible. Dante describes 9 levels of Hell based on the degree of sins as defined by the writer. This is fiction in every respect. Neither the current temporary Hell nor the permanent Lake of Fire have levels of punishment. All residents are equally punished for one single reason alone, which is rejection of salvation for humans, and rejection of God by Satan and fallen angels. The degree of sins are not the issue. Jesus Christ paid for all sins, at least human ones. They cannot be judged again, even during eternity. It is the rejection of salvation through Jesus Christ which is punished.

Saved Humans (Believers)

In extreme contrast, eternity for believers in Jesus Christ will be wonderful, but it is not so simple as saying all believers go to heaven when they die and remain there forever. For a long time no believer

even went to heaven when they died. And heaven will not be the eternal dwelling place for any believer. And not every believer will be equally happy during eternity. Let us take these issues in sequence since most believers do not understand any of them.

Until Jesus Christ actually provided salvation by His death on the cross, was resurrected three days later, and ascended to heaven 40 days after the cross, no one who died went to heaven. All Old Testament believers at the point of death went to a place called Paradise in the middle part of the earth. It was a very nice place, and the name is all the description we have. No human was allowed to enter heaven until the work providing salvation was actually completed by Jesus Christ on the cross. God complies with His own plan, and allowed Satan to attempt to make his argument and even attempt to thwart the cross to some degree, so no humans could enter heaven until salvation was a completed task. Therefore all Old Testament believers waited in Paradise after death until the cross had provided the reality of salvation. After His death, Jesus went to Paradise and told the believers waiting there that salvation had been completed. The thief being crucified alongside Jesus said to Him: Luke 23:42-43 "Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." The saved thief went to Paradise after death, not heaven. And Jesus resided there for three days until He was resurrected. Also during those three days Jesus visited Tartarus where fallen angels were imprisoned deep in the earth and told them they had failed to prevent the Messiah from providing salvation. After resurrection and ascension Jesus Christ brought all believers out of Paradise into heaven with Him. Salvation was a reality, so they could now be with God in heaven. Since that time all believers who die go directly and instantly to heaven. So we see there was a difference regarding how believers began their eternity depending on whether they died before or after the cross when salvation became a completed fact. However, believers now in heaven will not remain there during the Eternal State, as will be explained shortly.

All believers currently in heaven are waiting to receive their eternal resurrection body, a body like that which Jesus Christ received at His resurrection. Philippians 3:20 says "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." But if a person has died and is already in heaven, why do they need to be resurrected? What does that add beyond already being in heaven? Resurrection is about the believer

being given an eternal body, one which elevates the believer above the status of the angels. And it also allows eternal rewards to be granted. The rewards cannot be given until the eternal body is in place since the rewards are dependent on the believer having the powerful resurrection body.

Most believers will have three bodies during their existence, temporal and eternal. The soul and spirit require a body to interface with the outside, whether on earth, in heaven, or wherever. That is because the soul and spirit require "senses", otherwise they are isolated. First, while during the natural life on earth the soul has a mortal body, with its many limitations. The soul and spirit interface with the outside world using the mortal senses of the earthly body. When the believer dies the soul and spirit are put into a temporary body capable of living apart from the earth, and that body is used while the believer waits to be resurrected. This body is a fairly "plain" non-mortal interim body in which all believers are equal while waiting for their resurrection. Eternal rewards and honors have not yet been awarded to this interim body, so all believers are equal in status. Then the final eternal body is the resurrection body, given at the point of resurrection. This is the body the believer will have forever. It is a body more powerful than any angel. It is a body like that of Jesus Christ. And it is a body which will have the eternal rewards and honors bestowed on it.

There are multiple resurrections for believers of the various Ages of time. The only human currently in a resurrection body is Jesus Christ. His resurrection occurred three days after His crucifixion. The next group of believers to be resurrected will be the Church, and this will occur at the Rapture (resurrection) of the Church at the end of the Church Age. Before the Tribulation begins every Church Age believer who has died will be brought out of heaven to receive a resurrection body in the outer atmosphere of the earth. At the same time every living believer will be removed from the earth apart from death, and will be put directly into a resurrection body, and this is the exception to having three bodies during existence since they will skip the interim body. After resurrection bodies have been given to every Church Age believer they will all re-enter heaven and will be given their eternal rewards.

Therefore as of now all believers are in a relatively "plain" interim non-mortal body because the soul and human spirit need to be in a body to have sensory function, therefore after death and until resurrection every believer is put into an interim heavenly body without rewards, so all believers in

heaven are currently equal in status. Those who are in this status can interact, converse, recognize each other, and so on, much like on earth but without a sinful nature in the interim body, so life is certainly much better after death for believers.

As mentioned, the resurrection body will be a body like Jesus Christ has. We know some things about His body from what Jesus said about it, and since He spent 40 days on the earth after His resurrection the disciples noted several things about it. Jesus said during the Last Supper He would eat and drink wine during the Millennium in His resurrection body, so we know that these will continue for our pleasure. Matthew 26:29 says "I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." After the resurrection Jesus appeared to the disciples, and Luke 24:36 says "While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence." We see Jesus in resurrection body eating, showing Himself to be flesh and bone, and showing the scars of His crucifixion. The rest of us believers will not have physical scars or even imperfections of body, since the scars of Jesus are a memorial to His salvation work on the cross. But we will be something called "flesh and bone", however in a form very different than now. Our bodies will be able to travel instantly through space, will be able to walk through solid earthly objects, and will be immortal. We will have this body during the Millennium when people are living out their natural lives on earth, and this will be our same eternal body. But this helps us see how eternity will be like our life on earth, except perfect and without sorrows, pain, or death. Life in eternity will be organized, orderly, structured, and have a hierarchy of rulership. It will be a societal structure with Jesus Christ ruling nations of groupings of believers. There will be rank and structure based on how well believers lived out their spiritual lives while on earth. We can also assume other physical things we enjoy in our earthly body may also continue, but we are not told the specifics. One would assume sports would be significantly different, since our bodies will be so highly capable. But maybe the sports will be different, and even better. This is just to show how much eternity will be like our lives on earth in terms of structure and society,

only far, far better. And there are many things we cannot even imagine, they will be so wonderful beyond description.

As noted, Jesus Christ was resurrected three days after the cross, and He is the only one who currently has a resurrection body. Believers will be resurrected in three phases. The Church Age believers will be the first to be resurrected at the Rapture of the Church. The Rapture (resurrection) of the Church is the next prophetic event in human history when all living believers will be removed from the earth apart from death and taken to heaven in an eternal resurrection body. The Church is the first group of believers to receive this eternal resurrection body, and until the Rapture occurs only Jesus Christ has a resurrection body. 1 Corinthians 15:51 “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” At the Rapture all living Church Age believers are removed from the earth apart from death and receive their eternal resurrection bodies in the earth's outer atmosphere. At the same time all Church Age believers who had previously died come out of heaven to receive their resurrection bodies along with those living believers who were just called off the earth apart from death. Then the entire resurrected Church enters heaven together with the Lord. Then during the seven year Tribulation on earth, all Church Age believers will be evaluated in heaven by the Lord and given eternal rewards based on their spiritual life while on earth. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 tells us about the resurrection of the Church:

"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.¹⁴ For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

After the Church the next group of believers to receive resurrection bodies will be Old Testament believers and most Tribulation believers. This will occur seven years after the resurrection of the Church just prior to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. Adam, Eve, Abraham, David, the prophets, and so on will all receive their resurrection bodies at that time, since they are about to return to earth for the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ. The Tribulation believers will also be included, except that one group will not receive a resurrection body at this time, namely those believers who took the Mark of the Beast during the Tribulation. These believers must wait another 1000 years to receive their eternal body due to their serious failure.

The final group to be resurrected will be Millennial believers at the end of the Millennium. This resurrection will also include those Tribulation believers whose resurrection is delayed for reasons of extreme failure.

So the various resurrections of believers (collectively called the “First Resurrection”) occur in stages, starting with Church Age believers (Rapture of the Church), then Old Testament and most dead Tribulation believers (just prior to the Second Advent), and finally Millennial believers (at the end of the Millennium) plus a few stragglers from the Tribulation.

After the Millennium is complete, human history is over and the Eternal State begins and never ends. The current earth and universe will be destroyed. A new universe with a new heavens and new earth will be created, which will be far superior to the current ones. God creates a new heavens and new earth with a New Jerusalem hovering above the new earth. Eternity begins, and all believers are moved from heaven and put into this eternal universe to live forever in resurrection bodies with Jesus Christ and the entire Trinity. It is important to understand the significance of this, since it means believers will not spend eternity in Heaven, but rather in the new universe God will create for believers in resurrection bodies. Heaven will be moved into the New Jerusalem of the new universe.

The eternal status of believers who died prior to the start of the Millennium requires some further amplification. During the Millennium, believers who had died prior to it will all be in resurrection body and will return to earth to live among the people in natural bodies for the 1000 years of the

Millennium. They will reign with Jesus Christ and serve in various positions of authority over the natural humans living on the earth, serving the Lord as He rules the earth during that time. That will be unusual, believers who had previously died and are in resurrection bodies with eternal rewards living among natural humans living out their lives. It will be an interesting time.

New Universe, New Earth & New Jerusalem

After the Millennium when human history ends the Eternal State will begin and go on forever with all believers and elect angels residing with God, while all unbelievers, Satan, and fallen angels will reside apart from God in the Lake of Fire. We believers have a wonderful eternal future beyond human history in a resurrection body living with our Lord in a new eternal universe and on a new earth far superior to the current one. Fallen angels and unbelievers have a horrible eternity in store for them due to their rejection of God and His grace plan. The book of Revelation describes the Eternal State in detail, so we will take a close look at what it says. Starting in Revelation chapter 21:

Rev 21:1 “Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”

After the current earth and universe are destroyed at the end of human history, eternity for believers will not be spent in the current heaven but rather in a new universe and on a new earth. The new earth and universe are prepared to accommodate the powerful resurrection bodies of believers, which will be superior to the current bodies of angels. Jesus Christ said our bodies would be just like His (Philippians 3: 20-21). These bodies will be capable of instantaneous space travel, so the entire new universe will be available for the pleasure of believers for all eternity. We will not need sleep. We will eat for pleasure but won't need food for sustenance. There will be no need for a sun or moon since God's glory will be the source of all light. There will be no need for rain, so no oceans or seas will be on the new earth to drive a rain cycle. The new earth will not be cursed like the old earth prior to the Millennium, whereby man struggled on the old earth through the “sweat of the brow”. As Genesis 3: 17 says: “To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.” This curse is not applied to the new earth. Light

will fill the New Jerusalem and new earth, and that light is directly from God. But those who reside in the Lake of Fire will be in eternal darkness without any light since there is nothing of God there, and light is only from God. Whatever we can conceive the new earth will be like, we will come up way short.

Rev 21:2 “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

The New Jerusalem, something like a cube satellite 1400 miles square (roughly the size of the current earth's moon) will hover over the new earth. The New Jerusalem is currently a part of heaven, and will be detached and moved into position above the new earth at the beginning of the Eternal State. This will include the throne-room of the Trinity, the true Holy of Holies in heaven, which will be transferred from heaven into this new eternal city, so that God will live among His believers (and elect angels) forever. The New Jerusalem will also be the dwelling place for the “spiritual winners” of all time – the Old Testament, Church Age, Tribulation, and Millennial believers who fulfilled their spiritual life while on earth. These are the believers who will live in the New Jerusalem with Jesus Christ, and will be part of His ruling hierarchy. The rest of the believers who did not fulfill their spiritual lives while on earth (most believers) will live on the new earth and possibly elsewhere in the new universe. Since Jesus Christ will reside in the New Jerusalem, that is where every believer will want to reside, but only those who excelled in their spiritual life during human history will reside there. This is the most significant difference among believers during all eternity, their individual access to the Lord, which will be the most highly prized issue for all eternity.

Rev 21: 4 ““He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Note that believers in eternity are promised an end to unhappiness, and therefore are promised basic happiness, but they are not promised perfect happiness or equality. This verse focuses on the “negatives” being removed, not on the level of happiness since that will be an individual issue. There

will be degrees of eternal blessing based on how well each believer lived their spiritual life while on earth, so there will not be equality of status or happiness. Since all believers will be in eternal resurrection bodies with no sinful nature, and will be in a place without any “negatives”, their eternal life is one of basic happiness. But those spiritual winner believers who reside with Christ in the New Jerusalem will have rewards exceeding all other believers of all time, including greater access to the Lord and the Father, among other fantastic blessings. Those who live on the new earth below the New Jerusalem will have happiness, but less status and fewer levels of rewards, and will not have nearly the access to the Lord. Once again we see various levels of rewards for believers based on their spiritual life during human history. Everyone will have basic happiness since all the “negatives” that caused unhappiness on earth will be gone, but some will have more happiness, greater access to the Lord, more status as rulers, crowns and special clothing showing spiritual achievements during their life, and other currently unimaginable rewards than those who did not fulfill their spiritual life while on earth. The Bible mentions that rewards will include crowns, rulership, a better residence (New Jerusalem), greater access to the Lord, a better “uniform” with decorations, shining brightly (Daniel 12:3), and other types of undefined benefits: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived — the things God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9) There will be hierarchy and structure, and the Lord “shall reign forever and ever” with believers having places in that structure based on their spiritual life while on earth. Overall the single most important difference will be the level of access each individual believer has to the Lord throughout eternity, and this will be the ultimate reward separator defined by living either with the Lord in the New Jerusalem or on the new earth with less access to the Lord.

The Bible says Jesus Christ will rule forever and ever. He will first rule on the current earth during the 1000 year Millennium, and after the current earth and universe are destroyed He will continue to rule for all eternity in the new heavens and new earth from His throne in the New Jerusalem with the entire Trinity residing there.

Rev 21:6 “He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.”

Jesus Christ declares that after the Millennium is complete, human history is “done”, and so also the angelic conflict is “done”. He is the beginning and end, and all believers of all time are with Him forever in the Eternal State, even though they have various levels of rewards and status. The purpose of creating mankind and putting them on the earth during human history was to resolve the angelic conflict and prove to Satan that God was Just, Righteous and Fair to condemn Satan and all fallen angels to the Lake of Fire forever, and that such actions did not violate His perfect Love. Human history will have proved God's grace to man who was offered salvation by a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ which gives the “water of life” Jesus offered to all during His time on earth. John 4: 14: “Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Satan chose against God, but during the course of human history many humans choose for God through Jesus Christ, and the various Ages of time during human history will have proven from many different aspects how wrong Satan was. Now that the angelic conflict has been settled, Jesus Christ declares both it and human history “done”. And with it, Satan is also “done”.

Rev 21:7 “Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.”

All believers of all time, regardless of spiritual victory or failure to fulfill their spiritual life while on earth, will be included in the new Eternal State described here. But this verse emphasizes how the “victorious” spiritual winners during their time on earth will inherit special blessings, status, and greater personal access to Jesus Christ. Of course, anyone who is a believer will be very glad to be there, and very grateful to the Lord for what He did to enable it. And the Lord will love them all as His children.

The Lord says He will wipe away the old things from human history, and all will be perfect in His presence forever. He personally declares this to be the truth. Believers will inherit great blessing for all eternity. Unbelievers will be sent into the Lake of Fire forever, which is the second death. There is nothing in between, and there will be no crossing over. It is all “done” as the Lord says in this passage.

Rev 21:9 “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”¹⁰ And he carried me away in the

Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

Now the Apostle John is shown a vision of the New Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven”, meaning it is being detached from heaven and positioned over the new earth where it will become part of the new universe of the Eternal State forever. We previously discussed how this city is currently part of heaven, so it will be detached and moved to hover over the new earth after the new universe is created. It is called “the Holy City” since it is currently part of heaven, and in the Eternal State it will include the throne room of God, and Jesus Christ will rule during eternity from there. And the entire Trinity will reside in the New Jerusalem instead of in the existing heaven. The current heaven will apparently cease to exist, and the new Jerusalem will replace it as the throne room of God. Recall the current earth and universe as we now know them will be destroyed at the end of human history, so everything here is new – new earth, new universe, and a new eternal city. The New Jerusalem is said to be analogous to a bride since its description is as something desirable and of great beauty. So this is not a reference to the Church as the Bride of Christ, but rather describes the appearance of the New Jerusalem which will be beautiful like a bride is to her husband on their wedding day.

Hebrews 12:22 expands on the New Jerusalem when it says "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." This portion of the current heaven called the "heavenly Jerusalem" will be detached from heaven and become the New Jerusalem, since we have seen it descends with Christ to hover over the new earth at the beginning of the Eternal State. This passage shows the New Jerusalem as a place of joy, of direct access to God and Jesus Christ, a place where one would want to be forever during eternity. Yet relatively few will fulfill their spiritual life while on earth in a manner which gains them the reward of entrance to live in the New Jerusalem for all eternity. But this should be motivation to believers that life on earth is very short and not the important part of our total life. Our life will continue for eternity, which should cause us to focus on the larger part of our life, not on the shorter.

Rev 21:11 “It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

The New Jerusalem is described in terms we can relate to now, but is not actually made from these current jewels and precious stones. The entire city is made of translucent materials not currently known, and they shine as they reflect the glory of Jesus Christ, the only source of light for all eternity. The walls have 12 gates reminding of the 12 tribes of Israel. The city walls have 12 foundation stones reminding of the 12 apostles to the Church. So the gates remind of Israel and the foundation reminds of the Church. This ties Israel and the Church together, two major components of God's plan for history although during human history they were always kept separate. As noted, this city is where spiritual winners from human history will reside with Jesus Christ during eternity, and everyone else will reside on the new earth below. Those residing in the New Jerusalem will be in the hierarchy of rulership over the earth below supporting the reign of the Lord.

Rev 21:15 “The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶ The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. ¹⁷ The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick.”

The New Jerusalem is a cube, nearly 1400 miles long, wide, and high. That would be the right size to roughly hover above the lands promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21. These lands will belong to the Jews during the Millennium, but in the Eternal State the old earth will be gone, so the New Jerusalem is the replacement promised to Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-10) and also for all spiritual winners of all time. The city has walls nearly 1400 miles high and over 200 feet thick.

Rev 21:18 “The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh

chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.”

It is the New Jerusalem – not Heaven -- which has the features often referred to as “streets paved with gold” and “pearly gates”, but even these references are not quite accurate. The entire city is made of a gold-like translucent material including the streets, and the walls are like pure continuous diamond. The foundations of the walls are decorated as described here with all sorts of translucent precious stones not currently known, but a variety something like those listed, providing great beauty. The 12 gates are each an entire entity like a giant pearl in appearance. The overall appearance is one of translucent shining beauty which reflects the glory of Jesus Christ and provides pleasure to those who see it, both humans in resurrection bodies and angels. We see here that God will provide pleasure for His believers in every way possible, including visual beauty throughout the New Jerusalem, new heavens and new earth.

Rev 21:22 “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”

Jesus Christ will reside with His believers and angels during the Eternal State, so there is no need for a temple building to represent Him to us. The temple buildings for Israel always represented Jesus Christ and showed aspects of His salvation sacrifice for us (brazen altar), his God-Man status (gold overlaying wood on temple furniture), the Holy of Holies representing Jesus Christ in Heaven, and so forth. The New Jerusalem is the eternal Holy of Holies represented first in the Tabernacle from the time of Moses until Solomon, and then in various temples of Jerusalem on the current earth, from Solomon's temple to the Millennial temple, since the New Jerusalem is the dwelling place of the Lord forever. Also, God's glory through Jesus Christ will be the source of all light in the Eternal State, so there is no need for a sun or moon. And the new heavens (universe) will be full of destination planets to visit for pleasure, and resurrection bodies will be capable of traveling through space instantly.

Rev 21:24 “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

While spiritual winner believers will reside in the New Jerusalem with Jesus Christ, the remainder (most believers) will reside on the new earth, which of course will be very nice indeed, just not as desirable as the New Jerusalem, and will not have nearly the access to Jesus Christ, which will be the most prized thing during the Eternal State. This new earth will have organization structure something like our current nations, and will be ruled by those who live in the New Jerusalem, so the view of eternity which has no structure or organization is not accurate. Those who reside on the new earth will periodically bring offerings to Jesus Christ in the New Jerusalem, which will be one of the rare times they can visit the city and see Jesus Christ. This provides additional details about one of the major differences in eternity for believers based on how well they accomplished their spiritual life while on earth, namely that access to the New Jerusalem and therefore to Jesus Christ will be limited for those believers who ignored their spiritual life during human history. Note here “The nations will walk by its light” meaning the New Jerusalem is the replacement for the sun and moon, as the light from Jesus Christ shines from the New Jerusalem onto the new earth. This verse says “there will be no night there” in the New Jerusalem, which would also imply there will be no night anywhere for believers during the Eternal State. We are also reminded in this verse that all unbelievers will be in the Lake of Fire forever so can never enter the New Jerusalem or be anywhere else in the Eternal State with God, and also that they will be in darkness apart from God's light. Once the person's life has ended, whether believer or unbeliever, their status for all eternity is locked in forever.

To expand on what has been covered in Revelation 21 it is worth noting that most ideas people currently have about eternity are wrong. All who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior will be in this new eternal state regardless of their spiritual life after salvation. But believers will not turn into angels. We will not play harps while sitting on clouds. We will not all be equal. But we will all have a resurrection body like Jesus Christ has right now. There will be rank and order and structure and variations in status, with spiritual winner believers having much more of everything than those who failed to fulfill their spiritual life while on earth. Before this Eternal State begins all believers who

have died will reside temporarily in heaven, then during the Millennium most will be on the earth in their eternal bodies in various levels of leadership positions based again on how well they fulfilled their spiritual life. But after human history is complete the current universe will be destroyed, and all believers during the Eternal State will live in a new heavens (universe) and new earth with a New Jerusalem hovering above the new earth. Spiritual winner believers will reside in the New Jerusalem with Jesus Christ, while all other believers will only be allowed occasional visits and will live on the new earth. We will be able to travel throughout the new universe and explore and use it for our pleasure. This is what eternity for believers will actually be like, although this is only a tiny glimpse of what God has in store for all of us who believed in Jesus Christ while living on earth. We see from this chapter that God has something wonderful and exciting for believers in the Eternal State, and we will never be unhappy, bored, or otherwise uncomfortable. But there will be differences in levels of happiness based on how well we fulfilled our spiritual lives while believers on earth.

Next, Revelation 21 leads us inside the New Jerusalem to take a look around:

Rev 22:1 “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

The New Jerusalem will be the new throne-room of God and Jesus Christ, having been moved from the current Heaven into the New Jerusalem during the Eternal State. The Trinity will actually “reside” in the New Jerusalem during the Eternal State. The satellite city will have the original Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden, which is currently being guarded by angels until it is moved during eternity.

Genesis 3: 24 says: “After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” A “river of the water of life” is described as flowing down the middle of the main street, with the Tree of Life on either side, possibly rooted on both sides and arching over and connected as a single tree. This shows how the New Jerusalem will be a reinstatement of the Garden of Eden in many ways. Revelation 2:7 says “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” The Tree of Life will bear a different fruit each month, yielding twelve different fruit crops. Note there will be a

twelve month calendar during eternity since humans orient to time, and also shows once again how eternity is a place of order and organization. We will eat and drink, but only for pleasure. We will not need to eat for sustenance or to maintain our status since that is locked in forever. The River of the Water of Life and the Tree of Life remind us that God will never allow anyone to lose their status for all eternity, and that during eternity we cannot do anything to lose what God has given us as a result of faith in Jesus Christ while we were on earth. It is noted that the fruit is for those who were “victorious” in their spiritual lives and therefore will reside in the New Jerusalem, but the leaves will go to the nations on the new earth below for the “health of the nations” (not “healing”). The fruit vs. leaves shows yet another difference among believers in eternity based on various levels of reward status, as eating the fruit is better than having the leaves, whether as tea or otherwise.

Rev 22:3 “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”

Again this shows the Throne-room of God the Father and Jesus Christ will be relocated from the current Heaven into the New Jerusalem. It is assumed that since the New Jerusalem comes down out of Heaven itself, and the Throne-room of Heaven as it now exists will be moved into the New Jerusalem forever, perhaps all of current Heaven is moved into the New Jerusalem and no longer used, but that is not specifically stated. The Trinity will dwell with believers forever inside this new universe, and the spiritual winners who reside in the New Jerusalem will have supporting roles for the rule of Jesus Christ and will have rulership positions over the structure on the new earth below. Again we see a structured Eternal State to support the eternal worship of Jesus Christ the Savior and the entire Trinity. And structure is also important for the happiness of mankind even in eternity.

We see that the Eternal State for both elect angels and saved humans will not be lived in the current heaven, but rather in a new universe and on a new earth and with a New Jerusalem hovering above the new earth. There will be order and structure, with nations and organizational hierarchy. It will be an organized society with Jesus Christ as the King. All will have a basic level of happiness but there will be degrees of rewards and therefore degrees of happiness. Some will be rulers and some will be lower

level workers and staff members. The current heaven will be put into the New Jerusalem and the Trinity will live with all believers and elect angels forever in this new structure. Whatever we can conjure up of this Eternal State, it will be far more awesome than that.

Eternity is a complex subject with four separate categories of creatures with souls having separate tracks to their eternal status. Currently no creature is in their final location, and only elect angels are in their final bodies. Several changes will occur in the future, and the final changes will occur after human history ends and the current earth and universe have been destroyed. The final status of eternity for humans and angels will not be lived in either heaven or hell, since both will be replaced. All creatures with souls will live forever, either with God or apart from Him, and the difference in eternal status will be the ultimate in contrasts.

Conclusion

The Bible is meant to be understood since God revealed all the information contained in it for a reason, namely, that God wants us to understand Him, believe Him, trust Him, and as a result live by faith in Him. It is relatively easy to understand a few of the basic doctrines and principles contained in the Bible, but getting to the deep concepts and doctrines is difficult. And it is the deep concepts and doctrines which elevate our spiritual life to the highest levels possible.

This book has dealt with a number of deep doctrines which scholars have considered to be “inscrutable” (not knowable) and therefore not possible to understand in this life. Hopefully the reader now sees how wrong they were. God has made it possible to know Him at a deeply personal level. The topics chosen for explanation in this book are among those which have either been the least understood by Christians or those called inscrutable by scholars. There are many more subjects which could be covered, but at least we have made progress. Even if we do not understand everything fully, we can still understand God, His plan, and the things God wants us to know in the detail He has enabled us to understand them.

The Bible is truly an amazing gift, allowing mere mortals to understand God. It should be no surprise that it is hard to understand, but if it were not, then it would not be the truth from God. But God has not left us alone or without help, but rather has provided the Holy Spirit as our mentor, and He makes this understanding possible when we seek to learn. And it is learning the Word of God by consistent study which fills our human spirit with God's truth, renovates our thinking, elevates our spiritual life, glorifies God and our Savior Jesus Christ, and results in great blessings during our life on earth and during the Eternal State. And after all, the Bible is the roadmap for the Christian way of life, and we need to know the way.

We have explored doctrines such as the Trinity, the interaction of the humanity and deity of Christ, and others which, once they are understood, serve to deepen our knowledge of God and engender greater love and worship of Him. Of course, we would like to know even more, but what we can understand from the Bible is enough to make our faith very strong. God has revealed amazing things to us if we would just seek to know them.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8
For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be
opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)